



 Prestwick House

Activity Pack

THE COLOR OF WATER

BY JAMES MCBRIDE



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Written by Kelley Sondra Abel

Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading

Keeping a Food Journal

Objective: Being aware of one's food intake and nutritional choices

Activity

Once you begin reading this book, you will become aware that the author's mother must provide food for twelve children on a very limited budget. She ultimately ends up as a single mother who goes to great lengths to be sure that her children have adequate nourishment. Despite her attempts, the children are often hungry due to the family's financial situation.

In this country, many children go hungry at the same time that some children are overfed. In either case, many people eat foods that are high in calories and low in nutritional value. What do you eat? How often do you eat? How much do you eat? Whether you eat too little or too much, you may not be fully aware of how your food intake affects your nutrition.

I. To become more conscious of your food choices, keep a food journal. For the next seven days, write down every single thing that you eat or drink—food and beverage—no matter how little you consume, and write down the quantity. Then, for each meal, snack, and beverage, calculate the calories. You can consult a website or book for help. Two sites are:

- www.thecaloriecounter.com/
- www.annecollins.com/calories/index.htm

The chart that follows will help you stay organized.

II. Once you have completed the food journal, evaluate your food choices for the week. Based on what you ate, how would you evaluate your food choices? What trends do you notice? Do you think that you are well nourished? Why or why not? Do you think that you make healthy food choices? What have you learned about your food consumption? What changes should you make and why?

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. Dead

Evaluating TV

Objective: Examining television programs

Activity

The author mentions television shows, such as *Dallas* and the *Three Stooges*, that were popular during his day. Although these shows were polar opposites, each was thought to be wildly entertaining, and they were both widely viewed.

Make a list of the four most popular current television shows. For each show, answer the following questions:

- What is the theme and/or purpose of this show?
- Who is the target audience? Is the theme/purpose appropriate for the target?
- When does it play and on what channel? Why is this significant?
- Who are the main characters? What are they like? Describe them.
- What does the show promote? What messages do you receive when you watch it?
- Why do people like watching this program?
- Do you enjoy this show; why or why not?

Now, describe your favorite show and explain why you watch it.

Name: _____

Date: _____

2. The Bicycle

Sports

Objective: Improving on/creating an original sport

Activity

McBride describes the way his mother appears as she rides the “old bike that went out of style a hundred years ago” through their neighborhood. Ultimately, he is embarrassed that his white mother would be seen performing a childish activity on such an antiquated mode of transportation, especially since his friends can see her. He disliked it when he says she “rode shakily past the triangle curve where I played stickball with my friends.”

Stickball is a sport that is similar to baseball. Many of the sports that are popular today are based on activities performed by cultures from the past. For example, think of those that are performed in the Olympics. Brainstorm a list of sports that people participate in and watch today. Then:

(A) Using the library, the Internet, or both, choose a sport and give an interesting presentation that informs your classmates about its origins and popularity throughout its history. You may make a poster, PowerPoint presentation, video, etc., as a visual media to support a brief oral statement.

(B) Choose a sport that interests you and think of a way to improve upon it or change it some way. Be sure that your improvements make the sport different from the original. For example, kickball is simply baseball without the bat and a bigger ball. Because the equipment has been changed, it is played differently. However, the rules are basically the same.

(C) Create a new sport and be sure to state the objective, rules, necessary equipment, etc. Then, describe who this sport would appeal to and how popular it might become.

Name: _____

Date: _____

3. Kosher

Collage

Objective: Creating a dowry for yourself

Activity

Tateh and *Mameh* were married by a *rov* who arranged marriage according to Jewish law. As part of an arranged marriage, *Mameh* brought a dowry to fulfill an aspect of the arrangement deal.

Having a dowry is not limited to Jewish custom; in fact, many cultures and groups give dowries before marriage. Imagine that you belong to one of these particular groups and create a dowry that you would bring to the family of your spouse-to-be.

To create your dowry, take a photograph of each item that belongs to you or your parent(s)/guardian(s) and arrange the photos in an interesting manner. If you do not have access to a digital camera, you can write a short description of each item, explaining also why it is included in your “dowry.” You may use a PowerPoint, poster board, etc., to showcase your items. Once you have created your dowry, describe in a few brief sentences how the process made you feel.

Name: _____

Date: _____

4. Black Power

Culture

Objective: Understanding Black Pride

Activity

In 1966, when the author was nine, “black power had permeated every element of my neighborhood in St. Albans, Queens. Malcolm X had been killed the year before and had grown larger in death than life. Afros were in style. The Black Panthers were a force. Public buildings, statues, monuments, even trees, met the evening in their original bland colors and reemerged the next morning painted in the sparkling ‘liberation colors’ of red, black, and green. Congas played at night...”

Notice that as Mr. McBride describes the time, he mentions several important symbols of African-American culture in the 60s: Malcolm X, the Black Panthers, Afros, and “Liberation Colors.” Afros, a form of hairstyle, were immensely popular at the time, as were many other things that showed “Black Power,” racial pride, and individuality.

The following list of names of items, people, places, and events relate to the rise of a feeling of independence and strength in black neighborhoods and individuals. Identify all you can in a sentence or two on the Black Power Chart that follows; for those that are unfamiliar, you may need to use other sources: relatives or adults you know who were alive during the 1960s, the Internet, libraries, etc.

Name: _____

Date: _____

5. The Old Testament

Dialogue

Objective: Writing dialogue

Activity

In “The Old Testament,” McBride’s mother describes the way in which she lived with her siblings and parents—they were a poor Jewish family who “attracted a lot of attention” whenever they traveled. She was especially embarrassed of her mother’s handicap: “I was ashamed of my mother,” she says.

Think of a time when a parental figure has made you feel ashamed of him or her. Write a dialogue in which you calmly and maturely discuss the issue that is causing the embarrassment. Be sure to state the cause and suggest a possible resolution. Your dialogue should be at least half a page long.

Name: _____

Date: _____

6. The New Testament

Music

Objective: Creating song lyrics

Activity

James's mother is an active member in the church and loves to sing. However, according to him, she is awful—she had a voice that “sounded like a cross between a cold engine trying to crank on an October morning and a whining Maytag dishwasher.” Although she sang horribly, she “dug into hymns with verve and gusto: *‘Leaning...oh, leaning...safe and secure on the—’*” The children often tried to stifle their laughter; James often thought that the minister would stop the song.

Hymns are religious songs that are written and sung to show praise and adoration or are used as a prayer to a particular religious figure. Write your own song about a moral point—it should be at least two verses long and contain a chorus. If you do not want to write a hymn on religion, write song lyrics about a moral principle or positive aspect of life. You can write your lyrics to a popular tune to help you stay on the beat and keep a good rhythm.

Name: _____

Date: _____

7. Sam

8. Brothers and Sisters

Journal

Objective: Writing a journal entry

Activity

James's mother describes the times of the Great Depression:

This was the thirties, the depression, and folks were poor and they used guns and fishing rods to survive. If you got sick, God help you because you just died. Tuberculosis and double pneumonia were raging in those days, and *Mameh* had a great fear one of her kids would catch that...Black folks, our customers, they'd come in and buy BC powder, fill up on that, that was their doctor. That was the old powder you bought and took like aspirin...it had cocaine in it back then, but folks didn't know that. They'd take BC for any ailment...Folks got sick and died back in them days like it was a new dance coming out. Plop! Dead as a doornail.

Imagine that you are living during the Great Depression. Write a journal entry about what is going on and how you and your family members are surviving. Keep in mind that during this devastating time, inflation was rampant, and prices for goods skyrocketed; some people who were poor had to eat grass to fill their stomachs; people wasted almost nothing and reused almost everything. You may want to conduct some brief research in the library or online before writing your entry.

Name: _____

Date: _____

**9. Shul
10. School****Poem****Activity**

A “found” poem is a poem made up entirely of phrases or quotations found in the text. Go back through this chapter and make up a found poem of your own. The poem could tell the reader something about McBride’s emotional state, but this is not necessary; it may be totally unrelated to the action of the story, which is one of the best parts of writing a found poem.

Your poem should be at least 10 lines long. The lines do not need to rhyme, but they certainly may. You can arrange the phrases in any way you like and change the punctuation, but do not deviate from the actual words used in Chapters 9 and 10. Give the poem a title, which may or may not come from the book. Below is an example taken entirely from Chapter 8.

The Food She Cooked

Little money and little food, constantly hungry.
Devour the big lumps inside that caught in your teeth!
Your teeth will fall out;
A solitary toothbrush would cover five sets of teeth—
Gone—
Mysterious diseases:
I got my nose nearly broken.
The sighs all through the house—
A Third World country—
Out of control, scavenging for food—a precious grilled cheese,
A cold cup of coffee, peanut butter, lost in the sauce.
It was a real problem.