

FINDING YOUR PLACE IN THE WORLD; FINDING HOME

Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates

“This is your country, this is your world, this is your body, and you must find some way to live within the all of it.”

The Class

The New Student Seminar is a semester-long required course for all new undergraduates enrolled in the Steinhardt School. The seminar is your orientation to the university and our school and will introduce you to the nature of higher education and your program of study. Using the themes raised in the new student reading, you will explore your role as a member of our diverse, global, and inclusive academic community. This year we will be looking at how our histories and experiences have shaped our lives and will continue to shape our futures.

The Book

Framed as a letter to his son, Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* explores the idea of race in America. Coates shares the story of his awakening to the truth about his place in the world through a series of vignettes that move the reader from the streets of Baltimore to Howard University, from Civil War battlefields to the cafes of Paris. In this first person narrative, Coates paints vivid portraits of the people who shaped his life during his coming of age journey from elementary student to public intellectual. He shows us how the harsh realities of American culture have made him the person he is today, and how the realities of the global world will shape the man his son will become one day.

The Theme

Finding Your Place in the World; Finding Home

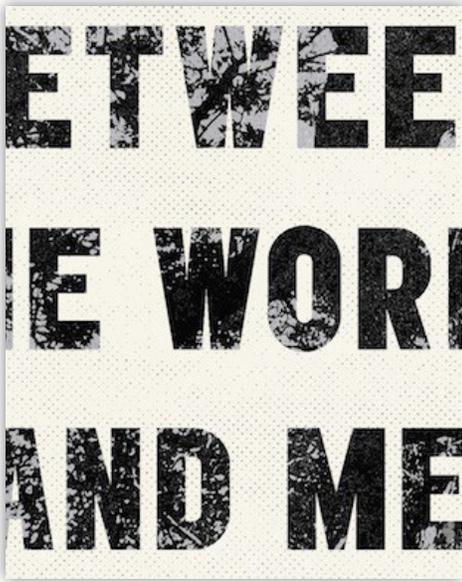
Between the World and Me is about the experiences that mold our identities and shape our experiences in all the places we call home. It is also about discovering new ideas and perspectives that expand our understanding of the world around us and underscore our need to belong. Coates asks us to think about where we have come from to better understand the power that our individual differences can have in creating our identities. He argues that by analyzing cultural and historical context, we can understand and nurture a resistance to dehumanization, of feeling inferior.

Things To Consider

Each of us is a product of a particular context. We are influenced by culture, history, the beliefs we were brought up with, and character and values of the people who raised us. Each of us interprets and internalizes the messages of our culture and creates from them a sense of self-esteem and vision of who we are in the world and how the world sees us.

As a new student at NYU, you are part of a global network of students who have been raised in different cultures, among different people with different values. You come together this year with a common goal: to further your education and enlarge your sense of the world.

This year we ask you to consider your journey and to think about how your journey has made you the person you are today. How might you think about who you are and where you feel you belong as you proceed into your academic future?



The Dean's New Student Convocation

In early October, the entering Class of 2016 will gather together with our dean and distinguished faculty to add a final note to the discussion of our New Student Reading, and reflect on our New Student theme.

Questions

1. What are the beliefs that have surrounded you as you have grown up?
2. How do you think these beliefs have shaped your identity and relationships?
3. How has your family prepared you for adulthood?
4. How has your community and/or cultural values shaped how you see and experience other people?
5. Where do you feel you most belong in the world? Describe this place and your feelings when you are there.
6. Coates described how his parents and friends have helped him to feel a sense of belonging. Have you ever struggled to belong or fit in? What was that like for you? What comes between the world and you?
7. How do you identify? How much of your sense of self is tied to that identity?
8. How would you describe the cultures that you are a part of?
9. When you navigate toward people who look like you or come from the same place as you, why do you do that?
10. How different are you from those around you? How similar are you from those around you?
11. In his letter to his son, Coates is offering a lesson about resisting the macrostructure of dehumanization. How is each of us a product of our cultures and how do those cultures serve to make us feel less than or superior to others?
12. How do you understand Coates' idea of "the body?" How does your body help you or prevent you from feeling at home in the world?
13. Use *Between the World and Me* to draw a map of your world. Who inhabits the world you have left behind and who is now a part of the new world that you call home?
14. What are some questions you would like to ask someone who is from a different culture or community?
15. Home is a place where we hope to feel a sense of security and belonging. NYU will be your home for the next several years. Write a letter to your younger self from the perspective of a person who has arrived at a new place. Write about your hopes and fears of being here.