



TeachersFirst READING TREKS

Black Was the Ink

Teacher Guide

Access Reading
Trek Map

Grade Level & Content Areas

Ages: 12–15

Grades: 7–9

Reading Level: 8th grade

Lexile Measure: 820L

Guided Reading Level: Z+

Developmental Reading

Assessment (DRA): 80

Content Areas: English/language arts, U.S. history, civics, and African American history.

Synopsis of Book

Black Was the Ink by Michelle Coles follows Malcolm, a modern-day Black teen struggling with personal challenges and systemic injustices. After discovering a mysterious journal, Malcolm is transported back to the Reconstruction Era, where he witnesses the achievements and dangers faced by Black lawmakers who shaped democracy after the Civil War. Through this journey, he gains insight into courage, activism, and the ongoing fight for justice.

Standards

Common Core State Standards for K–5

Reading: Literature

- Key Ideas and Details
- Craft and Structure
- Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

Writing

- Text Types and Purposes
- Research to Build and Present Ideas

Common Core State Standards for 6–12

Reading: Literature

- Key Ideas and Details

Writing

- Text Types and Purposes

- Craft and Structure
- Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- Research to Build and Present Knowledge

National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

- Theme 1: CULTURE
- Theme 2: TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE
- Theme 5: INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, AND INSTITUTIONS
- Theme 6: POWER, AUTHORITY, AND CHANGE
- Theme 10: CIVIC IDEALS AND PRACTICES

Social Justice Standards

- Identity
- Justice
- Diversity
- Action

Using a TeachersFirst® Reading Trek to Explore This Book

TeachersFirst Reading Treks create a virtual field trip of resources about a piece of literature or a text using the My Maps feature of Google Maps. To motivate and enrich student reading, teachers and students can reference this visual collection of web resources and images related to a book's content.

TeachersFirst has done the hard work for you! Use the activities in this teacher guide and the accompanying [Reading Trek map](#) as you and your students explore this book. And, if you feel inspired, you (or your students) can create your own Reading Trek about this or another book!

Using This Reading Trek in Class

Below is a list of ideas for using this Reading Trek in your educational setting.

Working with the Map:

1. Introduce the book to the whole class by displaying the [Reading Trek map](#) on an interactive whiteboard and highlighting its various layers.
2. Have students build a collaborative Google My Maps ([TeachersFirst review](#)) project tracing a character's movements throughout the story. At each pinned location, students can add a description, an image, and a question they still have. They should also include a quote that reveals the character's feelings or challenges at that point in the journey.
3. Use Canva for Education ([TeachersFirst review](#)) to create a visual "scene snapshot" from any map location in the novel. Students can choose a background image that reflects the terrain, add character silhouettes, and write two or three caption boxes describing the conflict, mood, and theme captured. Encourage them to include a symbol or color

that represents the emotional tone of the scene.

4. Have students use Book Creator ([TeachersFirst review](#)) to build a dual-voice journal that alternates between two characters' experiences at the same or different map locations. Each journal page can include a short written reflection, a photo or drawing, and an optional audio recording. Students should connect each entry to a specific place pinned on the [Reading Trek map](#).
5. Create a Padlet ([TeachersFirst review](#)) with columns labeled with significant map locations.

Extension Activities:

1. Have students collect small, safe materials from home or the classroom and use them to build a sculpture representing a central theme from *Black Was the Ink*, such as justice, identity, courage, or the importance of remembering history. After completing the sculpture, students write a short card explaining how each object connects to an event, emotion, or idea from the story.
2. Invite students to use Genially ([TeachersFirst review](#)) to design a presentation explaining a historical idea related to the novel. They might model how policy decisions affected Black legislators during Reconstruction or create a digital exhibit about a key figure such as Hiram Revels or Robert Smalls. Their work should show how the political and social issues explored in the novel connect to the world today.
3. Using Adobe Podcast ([TeachersFirst review](#)) or Spotify for Podcasters ([TeachersFirst review](#)), students can record a short podcast reflection from the perspective of Malcolm, Cedric, or a Reconstruction-era figure Malcolm meets. Each episode should reveal a lesson in courage, activism, or responsibility that the

Students can then post facts, images, vocabulary, and connections related to each location. They can also research environmental challenges, cultural traditions, or historical context tied to the setting. Over time, the Padlet becomes a collaborative, living map that deepens students' understanding of the novel's world.

character learns as he moves between the past and the present. This activity encourages students to blend historical understanding with creative voice work.

4. Have students use Canva for Education ([TeachersFirst review](#)) to design an awareness poster or an advocacy-style campaign on a current issue related to the novel. They might focus on protecting historical sites, voting rights, racial equity, or the importance of learning and preserving Reconstruction-era history. Each poster should include a quote from the book, a relevant statistic, and a positive action step people can take. Posters can be displayed digitally or in a school hallway gallery.
5. Ask students to use Google Drawings ([TeachersFirst review](#)) to create symbolic artwork that represents one of the book's central themes, such as justice, identity, memory, or the power of knowing your history. Students should select colors, shapes, and images that convey meaning, then write a short explanation describing how their artwork reflects the message of *Black Was the Ink*.

Helpful Resources

From TeachersFirst:

- [TeachersFirst CurriConnects Book List - Maps](#)
- [TeachersFirst Review of Google My Maps](#)
- [OK2Ask: Building Background Knowledge with Reading Treks](#)
- [OK2Ask: No Passport Required: Cross-Curricular Learning Journeys with Google My Maps](#)

Other Resources:

- [Library of Congress- Reconstruction and Civil Rights](#)
- [National Museum of African American History and Culture](#)
- [Lee & Low Books Study Guide](#)
- [Zinn Education Project](#)
- [Michelle Coles Website](#)