

Perspectives on Reparations

Literacy Grade 8 REACH Performance Task

Student Name: _____

Student ID: _____

School: _____

Teacher Name: _____

Task Description

Task Overview

Today you will demonstrate your ability to read, analyze, and respond in writing to two texts. You will have one class period (60 minutes) to read the passages and complete the task.

You will read and analyze **transcripts** of two **testimonies** given by Ta-Nehisi Coates and Coleman Hughes before Congress in which they shared their perspectives on how the U.S. government should address the issue of reparations for descendants of enslaved African Americans. These are written records of speeches that were given verbally. Reparations are money that is paid or actions that are taken by a government, group, or individual that caused harm to another government, group, or individual. The purpose of reparations is to *acknowledge the harm committed, to seek to repair that harm, and sometimes to prevent that same harm from happening again.* Both Coates and Hughes select, emphasize, and interpret facts in different ways in order to *communicate their opinions to Congress.*

Materials

1. Student Answers Document
2. Pencil or pen
3. Highlighter or colored pencil

Directions:

REACH Performance Tasks show how well you understand key standards, so it is important to do your best. You will have up to 60 minutes to complete this REACH Performance Task.

You should:

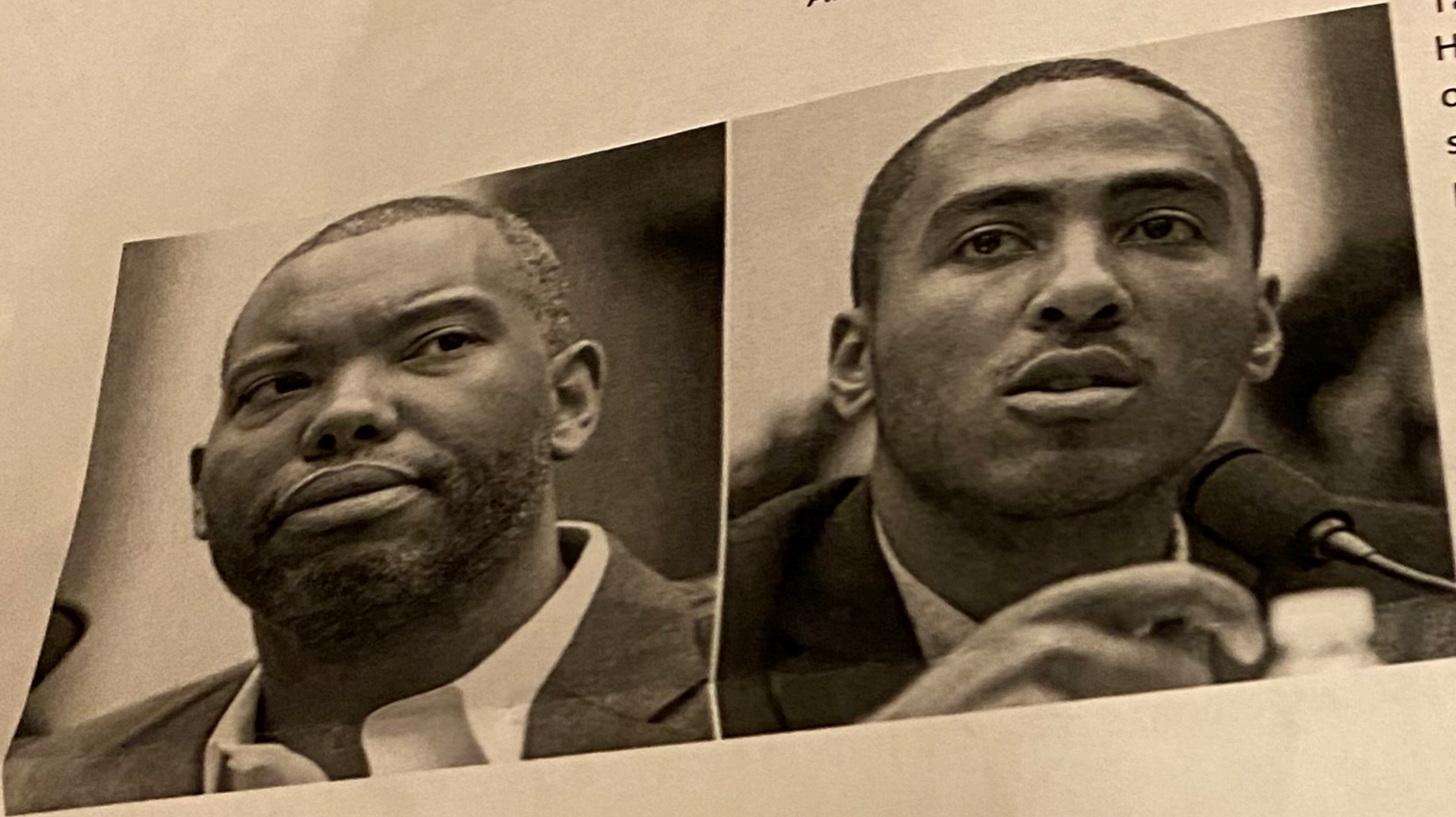
1. Read the questions before reading the texts.
2. Read the texts carefully. You are encouraged to annotate the text as you read.
3. As you read, pay attention to central ideas, supporting details, author's word choice and tone, and differences between the authors' perspectives.
4. After you read, complete all parts of the performance task on the attached pages.

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PRO/CON: "Should America pay reparations for slavery?"

By Ta-Nehisi Coates and Coleman Hughes / Adapted by Newsela staff
Newsela, September 22, 2020
Article & photo credits: Newsela



Ta-Nehisi Coates (left) and Coleman Hughes (right) speaking to Congress on a bill that would create a group to study and develop reparation proposals for African Americans.

Editor's note: Ta-Nehisi Coates and Coleman Hughes delivered the following testimony at a United States House Judiciary subcommittee hearing on Bill H.R. 40 on June 19, 2019. If passed, the bill would establish a commission for reparations.

PRO: Ta-Nehisi Coates: "The matter of reparations is one of making amends"

Yesterday, when asked about reparations, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell offered a familiar reply: America should not have to pay for something that happened 150 years ago, since none of us currently alive are responsible.

But in this century, the United States was still paying out pensions to the heirs of Civil War soldiers. We honor treaties that date back some 200 years, despite no one being alive who signed those treaties.

In a sense, we have inherited the problems of the past, and it is still our responsibility to deal with them. It is impossible to imagine America without the inheritance of enslavement.

As historian Ed Baptist has written, enslavement "shaped every crucial aspect of the economy and politics" of America, so that by 1836 more than \$600 million, almost half of the economic activity in the United States, derived directly or indirectly from the cotton produced by the million-odd enslaved people. By the time the enslaved were emancipated, they comprised the largest single asset in America. Three billion in 1860 dollars, more than all the other assets in the country combined.

When enslavement ended, this country could have extended its hallowed principles – life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness – to all, regardless of color. But America had other principles in mind. And so for a century after the Civil War, Black people faced a relentless campaign of terror, a campaign that extended well into the lifetime of Majority Leader McConnell.

"True Patriotism Means Recognizing The Whole Of Our History"

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It is tempting to divorce this modern campaign of terror, of plunder, from enslavement, but the logic of enslavement, of white supremacy, respects no such borders.

We grant that Mr. McConnell was not alive during enslavement. But he was alive when Jim Crow laws that denied Black people the chance to get an education and a good job were still in effect. Majority Leader McConnell cited civil rights legislation yesterday because he was alive to witness the harassment, jailing, and betrayal of those responsible for that legislation by a government sworn to protect them. He was alive for the redlining of Chicago and the looting of Black homeowners of some \$4 billion. Victims of that plunder are very much alive today. I'm sure they'd love a word with the majority leader.

What they know, what this committee must know, is that while Emancipation dead-bolted the door against the bandits of America, Jim Crow wedged the windows wide open. And that is the thing about Senator McConnell's "something": it was 150 years ago. And it was right now.

The typical Black family in this country has one-tenth of the wealth of the typical white family. Black women die in childbirth at four times the rate of white women. And there is, of course, the shame of this land of the free boasting the largest prison population on the planet, of which the descendants of the enslaved make up the largest share.

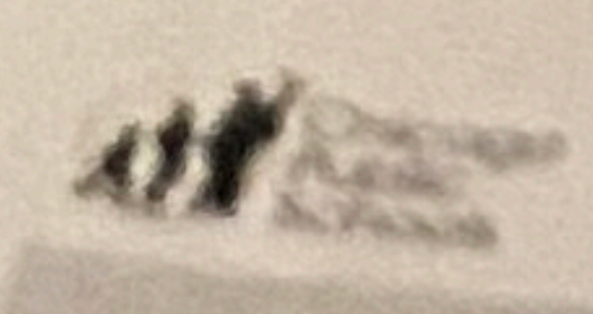
Reparations are a way of making amends, but it is also a question of citizenship. True patriotism means recognizing the whole of our history. If Thomas Jefferson matters, so does the enslaved woman Sally Hemings. If D-Day matters, so does Black Wall Street. Because the question really is not whether we'll be tied to the somethings of our past, but whether we are courageous enough to be tied to the whole of them. Thank you.

Writer Ta-Nehisi Coates is the author of "The Beautiful Struggle," "Between the World and Me" and "We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy," as well as the 2014 essay "The Case for Reparations."

CON: Coleman Hughes: "If we were to pay reparations today, we would only divide the country further"

Nothing I'm about to say is meant to minimize the horror and brutality of enslavement and Jim Crow. Racism is a bloody stain on this country's history, and I consider our failure to pay reparations directly to freed enslaved people after the Civil War to be one of the greatest injustices ever committed by the U.S. government.

But I worry that our desire to fix the past compromises our ability to fix the present. Think about what we're doing today. We're spending our time debating a bill that mentions slavery 25 times but prisons only once, in an era with zero enslaved Black people but nearly a million Black prisoners. I'm not saying that acknowledging history doesn't matter. It does. I'm saying there's a difference between acknowledging history and allowing history to distract us from the problems we face today.



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In 2008, the House of Representatives formally apologized for slavery and Jim Crow. In 2009, the Senate did the same. Black people don't need another apology. We need safer neighborhoods and better schools. We need a better criminal justice system and affordable health care. And none of these things can be achieved through reparations for enslavement.

"Justice For The Dead At The Price Of Justice For The Living"

If we were to pay reparations today, we would only divide the country further, making it harder for us to work together to solve the problems facing Black people today. We would insult many Black Americans by putting a price on the suffering of their ancestors. And we would turn the relationship between Black Americans and white Americans from a union between citizens into a lawsuit between plaintiffs and defendants.

What we should do is pay reparations to Black Americans who actually grew up under Jim Crow and were directly harmed by second-class citizenship — people like my grandparents.

But paying reparations to all descendants of enslaved people is a mistake. Take me for example. I was born three decades after Jim Crow ended into a privileged household in the suburbs. I attend an Ivy League school. Yet I'm also descended from enslaved people who worked on Thomas Jefferson's Monticello plantation. So reparations for enslavement would give me money, but not an American with the wrong ancestry, even if that person is living paycheck to paycheck and working several jobs to support a family. You might call that justice. I call it justice for the dead at the price of justice for the living.

I understand that reparations are about what people are owed, regardless of how well they're doing. But the people who were owed for slavery are no longer here, and we don't have the right to collect on their debts. Reparations, by definition, are only given to victims. So the moment you give me reparations, you've made me into a victim without my consent. You've made one-third of Black Americans — the majority of whom oppose reparations — into victims without their consent. Black Americans have fought too long for the right to define themselves to be spoken for in such a condescending manner.

The question is not what America owes me because of my ancestry. Rather, the question is what all Americans owe each other based on the fact that we are all citizens of the same nation. And the obligation of citizenship doesn't depend on ancestry, it never expires, and it can't be paid off. For all these reasons, bill H.R. 40 is a moral and political mistake.

Coleman Cruz Hughes is an American writer and opinion columnist on issues related to race and racism at the online magazine Quillette, a fellow and contributing editor at City Journal, and host of the podcast "Conversations with Coleman."

Source Citation

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Task Activity

Part 1: Key Ideas and Details

You have just read 2 testimonies in which the authors shared their perspective on the issue of reparations. Choose 1 to analyze for questions 1 and 2 of Part 1. Circle your choice below.

CIRCLE ONE:

Text #1: PRO: Ta-Nehisi Coates: "The matter of reparations is one of making amends"	Text #2: CON: Coleman Hughes: "If we were to pay reparations today, we would only divide the country further"
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1. Use the same article you selected above to complete the chart below.

- Identify a central idea and write it in a complete sentence.
- Identify 2 details that support the central idea.
- Explain in your own words how each of the supporting details you identified develops the central idea.

1a) Write the central idea of the article in a complete sentence:

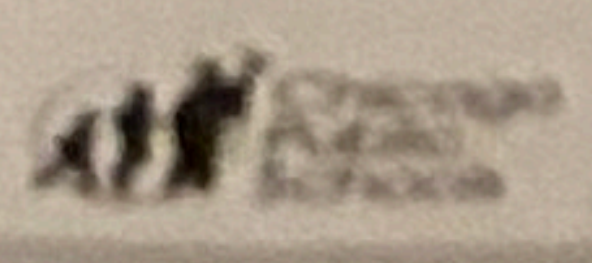
1b) Supporting Detail 1:

1d) Supporting Detail 2:

1c) How does this supporting detail develop the central idea?

1e) How does this supporting detail develop the central idea?

Student



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Part 2: Craft and Structure

Re-read the following excerpt from paragraph 8 of the text PRO: Ta-Nehisi Coates: "The matter of reparations is one of making amends" to answer question 2a.

"What they know, what this committee must know, is that while Emancipation dead-bolted the door against the bandits of America, Jim Crow wedged the windows wide open. And that is the thing about Senator McConnell's 'something': it was 150 years ago. And it was right now."

2a) What analogy does the author make in the excerpt above?

Based on the author's use of the analogy you identified above, determine the author's tone in the text PRO: Ta-Nehisi Coates: "The matter of reparations is one of making amends." Justify your answer by analyzing the analogy AND 1 additional word or phrase that contributes to the author's tone.

Complete the chart below to show your analysis.

2b) What is the author's overall tone in the text PRO: Ta-Nehisi Coates: "The matter of reparations is one of making amends"?	
What analogy does the author use that contributes to this tone? (Copy from your answer from 2a.)	2d) Additional word/phrase that contributes to this tone:
2c) How does this analogy contribute to the tone of the text?	2e) How does this word/phrase contribute to the tone of the text?

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Part 3: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas & Writing

3. You just read two perspectives on the issue of reparations for slavery in the United States.

Now you will write 2 paragraphs (5-10 sentences each) in which you identify and analyze the 2 most important ways the perspectives of these authors are different from one another. In your response, include at least 2 pieces of evidence from each article (4 total) to support your analysis. This question will evaluate both your reading and writing skills. You may use the graphic organizer below to plan your response, but only your writing on the lines that follow will be evaluated. Before submitting, use the checkbox prompt to check your work.

Important Difference 1	Important Difference 2

Did you include ...?

- 2 paragraphs written in complete sentences (5-10 sentences each)
- 2 pieces of evidence from each text (4 total)
- The 2 most important ways the perspectives of the authors were different
