**Sample analysis paragraphs**

**from James McBride’s *The Color of Water***

An important difference between James and his mother is their method of dealing with the pain they experience. While James turns inward, his mother Ruth turns outward, starting a new relationship, moving to a different place, keeping herself busy. Ruth herself describes that, even as a young girl, she had an urge to run, to feel the freedom and the movement of her legs pumping as fast as they can. As an adult, Ruth still feels the urge to run. Following her second husband’s death, James points out that, “while she weebled and wobbled and leaned, she did not fall. She responded with speed and motion. She would not stop moving” (163). As she bikes, walks, rides the bus all over the city, “she kept moving as if her life depended on it, which in some ways it did. She ran, as she had done most of her life, but this time she was running for her own sanity” (164). Ruth’s motion is a pattern of responding to the tragedy in her life. As a girl, she does not sit and think about her abusive father and her trapped life in the Suffolk store. Instead she just leaves home, moves on, tries something different. She does not analyze the connections between pain and understanding, between action and response, even though she seems to understand them. As an adult, she continues this pattern, although her running is modified by her responsibilities to her children and home.

Sample #2

One effect of the belief that white skin, blonde hair and blue eyes are the most beautiful is evident in the characters who admire white film stars. Morrison shows an example of the destructive effect of this beauty standard on the character Pecola. When Pecola lives with Claudia and Frieda, the two sisters try to please their guest by giving her milk in a Shirley Temple mug. Claudia recalls, “She was a long time with the milk, and gazed fondly at the silhouette of Shirley Temple’s face” (19). This picture of two young African-American girls admiring the beauty of a white American film star is impossible for Claudia to comprehend. Another character who admires white beauty is Maureen Peale. As Pecola and the girls walk past a movie theater on their way home with Maureen, Maureen asks if the others “just love” Betty Grable, who smiles from a movie poster. When she later tells the others she is cute and they are ugly, Maureen reveals her belief that she is superior because she looks more like a Betty Grable image than the blacker girls do. Pecola’s and Maureen’s fascination with popular images is preceded by Pauline’s own belief in the possibility of movie images. She describes doing her hair like Jean Harlow’s and eating candy at a movie. Rather than being transported into the romantic heaven of Hollywood, she loses a tooth and ends in despair. “Everything went then. Look like I just didn’t care no more after that. I let my hair go back, plaited it up, and settled down to just being ugly” (123). Admiring beauty in another is one thing; transferring a sense of self-hatred when a person doesn’t measure is another. At that point, the power of white beauty standards becomes very destructive.

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