Introduction
Black Boy by Richard Wright is a powerful account of the effects of poverty and prejudice on a child. Wright’s memoir includes fantastic events from his childhood in the Jim Crow South and reveals the intellectual awakening he experienced after moving to Chicago. This book examines many of the themes we will discuss throughout the school year. As you read Black Boy, consider its commentary on life in America and the obstacles many must overcome to achieve the American Dream.

Pre-Reading Assignment #1

In the book, Richard Wright recalls:

Hunger stole upon me so slowly that at first I was not aware of what hunger really meant. Hunger had always been more or less at my elbow when I played, but when I was five years old I began to wake up at night to find hunger at my bedside, staring at me. The hunger I had known before this had been no grim, hostile stranger, it had been a normal hunger that had made me beg constantly for a crust of bread, and when I ate a crust or two I was satisfied. But now for the first time in my life, I have to pause and think of what’s happening to me.

Other than the desire for food, what does the word hunger refer to?

The first hunger we feel as children is physical. As we mature, how do our hungers change to encompass our psychological and social needs?

List the ways in which you are hungry.

Discuss ways in which hunger is a thief. Create your own metaphor for hunger.
Pre-Reading Assignment #2

Perform a web search to learn about the following terms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jim Crow</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sharecropping</td>
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<tr>
<td>Great Migration</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Capitalism</td>
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<td>Communism</td>
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</table>

(A good place to start your search is at the PBS website http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/resources.html)
Explain the significance of the following events in Richard Wright’s life.

1. His father leaving home

2. Going to the store for his mother as a young boy in Memphis

3. His uncle’s murder

4. His principal giving him a speech to read at graduation

5. Getting the job at the movie house

6. Moving to Chicago
Character Sketch

Because *Black Boy* is an autobiography, readers get a chance to gain insight into many aspects of Richard Wright’s character. Not only do we get to interpret his actions, readers also have a chance to consider his thoughts and inner feelings when analyzing his character. Fill in the following chart to create a character sketch of Richard Wright as he is presented in *Black Boy* and yourself.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Richard Wright</th>
<th>You</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Born (Date, Location)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivations</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hopes</td>
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<td>Desires</td>
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<td>Loves</td>
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<td>Philosophy of life</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Saddest moment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Craziest moment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Three words that best describe this person</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Post-Reading Assignment #1

In the book, Richard Wright recalls:

Now I hunger to share the dominant assumptions of my time and act upon them...Why do I do that? My problem is here, here with me, here in this room, and I will solve it here alone or not at all. Yet I do not want to face it; it frightens me. I go out into the streets. Halfway down the block I stop. Go back. I return to my room determined to look squarely at my life. Well, what did I get out of living in the city? What did I get out of living in the South? What did I get out of living in America? I know that all I possess are words and dim knowledge that my country has shown me no examples of how to live a human life. All my life I have been full of a hunger for a new way to live.

What does Richard Wright mean when he writes, “I know that all I possess are words and dim knowledge that my country has shown me no examples of how to live a human life?”

What do you think it means to live a “human life?”

Do you agree or disagree that the role of a community, city and country is to give people guidance on how to live a “human life?”

What role has your community, city and country played in developing the kind of person you have become?

What should all people get out of living in America? What have you gotten out of living in America?
Post Reading Assignment #2

One way that Richard Wright’s character is formed is through his experiences in the world. What were the major experiences that formed his character? Why were these experiences so important?

Describe an experience that contributed to your development.

What led up to the experience?

Describe the experience.

How were you changed by this experience?
Vocabulary
Define each of the following words using context clues. (If you cannot determine the word’s meaning this way, look it up in the dictionary.)

Chapter 1: cryptic, languor, injunction, doggerel, copiously

Chapter 2: intangible, surreptitiously asafetida, emulate

Chapter 3: grapple, morose, elicited, predilection

Chapter 5: palatial, palled

Chapter 6: invectives, boon, sonorously, nominal, impudent

Chapter 7: florid

Chapter 8: impetus

Chapter 9: dissemble, breech

Chapter 10: subservience, repugnant

Chapter 15: translucently, feudalism, tawdry, terse, libations, travail

Chapter 16: cynical, oblique, succumbed, malinger, eschewing

Chapter 17: anarchy, insurgent, obviate, taciturn

Chapter 18: communism, tenets

Chapter 19: bourgeois, inherent, quixotic, Fascism, ideological, recrimination, internecine, truncated, aesthetic

Chapter 20: proletarian, sundered
Writing Prompt

Write an extended response to the following prompt. Refer to specific examples from the text in your response.

What is the book’s message on what it means to be a black boy growing up in America? Is this message one that still relates to today’s youth? Why or why not?