Study Guide Questions

Introduction:

On page 12, Tatum writes that as he "thinks about the literacy development of African American adolescent males" he is challenged by a series of questions. Choose two or three of them, listed below, to discuss with your group.

1. How are we conceptualizing literacy instruction for them?

2. How are we teaching these boys how to read and write and what texts are we using?

3. How do policies, mandates, curricula, and personal beliefs affect teachers who are genuinely concerned with addressing the literacy needs of these young men?

4. How are we nurturing the *identities* of these young males?

5. How are we supporting these young males to believe in themselves as academic, cultural, economic, human, social, and spiritual beings?

6. How are we helping these young males enjoy school?

Chapter 1:

Chapter 1 begins with an essential question for students and educators: How do I become and remain resilient? Discuss what this means in your personal and professional life. As a follow-up, discuss how you might help your students become (and remain) resilient.

Chapter 2:

◆ Bring to your study group a list of the texts you currently assign to your students. All together, ask yourselves the provocative questions Tatum poses on page 28.
  ◆ Out of all the texts in the world, why do we want to put these texts in front of African American adolescent males living in high-poverty communities?
  ◆ If I only had three to five texts to use with my students, which texts would I use?

Chapter 3:

In this chapter, Tatum discusses what he calls the "Vital Signs of Literacy Instruction" and four parallel gaps that may occur if these vital signs are not addressed.

◆ A reading achievement gap

◆ A relationship gap

◆ A rigor gap

◆ A responsiveness gap

Reexamine the table on page 45 where he lays out the vital signs and corresponding gaps, and discuss these questions and topics.

◆ How do you think you are doing in addressing students' needs in each area? In your classroom? In your school? Are there gaps?

◆ If there are gaps, work together to create a list of actions you might take individually or collectively to address and close the gaps.

Chapter 4:

Tatum used the texts in Figure 4.3 (page 79) "to identify the [four] characteristics of texts that African American males found significant and meaningful."

1. They provided a healthy psyche

2. They provided modern awareness of the real world

3. They focused on the collective struggle of African Americans

4. They served as a road map for being, doing, thinking, and acting

   ◆ Bring to your group a text that you currently assign or are considering assigning to your students. Together, try what Tatum asks at the chapter's end: "Audit [the] texts for enabling characteristics for African American adolescent males anchored by a clear definition for the role of literacy development for these young men."

   ◆ Together, try to identify texts that may be a radical departure from what is being offered to economically disadvantaged African American adolescent males attending today's middle and high schools and other social and educational institutions. Come up with a short list that you are willing to try in your own classrooms.

Chapter 5:

◆ Use the framework for mediating text (see Figures 5.2 and 5.3, pages 92–94) with a short literary or nonliterary selection that you believe is an enabling text for your students. Avoid co-opting the text with the framework. Ultimately, it's the texts that matter, particularly if the selection of the texts is guided by something deeply purposeful.

◆ After you teach the text, gauge the students' views about the lessons. Reflect together and discuss your classroom experiences with the lesson. Use students' response to your lesson to plan subsequent lessons.

◆ Draft your own textual lineage and bring it to your study group. Provide rationales for the texts in your lineage and share why they had an impact on you. (See Figure 8.1, "My Middle and High School Textual Lineage," at the beginning of Chapter 8 [page 132] for an example.)

Chapter 6:

Have each member of your group choose a poetic broadside to share with their students. Discuss your choices together—why you think it is an enabling text, and so on. After you each use the poem you chose in your classrooms, discuss how the lessons went. What worked and what did not? How might you revise the lesson—or move forward from here?

Chapter 7:

Have each member of your group choose a "black short" to share with their students. Discuss your choices together. After you each use the short story you chose in your classrooms, discuss how the lessons went. What worked and what did not? How might you revise the lesson—or move forward from here?

Chapter 8:

In this chapter, Tatum writes that "the examination of the characteristics of texts that engage students needs to be a part of the ongoing assessment process in schools. . . . Informally, teachers are already assessing how students respond to texts. This needs to become more systematic . . . planned, recorded, analyzed, and discussed. This is the only way to truly record African American adolescent males' relationship with text."

On page 138, Tatum shares his interview protocol that he uses with students to assess the "approximate types of texts that engage them." Then he writes:

> Curricula selection is now devoid of adolescents' input. African American adolescent males should be invited to participate in short-term focus groups and short-term case studies. A range of texts that include poetry, short stories, essays, speeches, newspaper clippings, and longer fictional and non-fictional pieces should be selected for the focus groups and case studies. Time should be set aside to discuss texts with African American males in literacy collaboratives. The groups should be small and manageable, roughly seven to ten African American male students.

Work together as a group, or individually, to set up short-term focus groups with African American male students. Select and provide students with several texts in advance. If you'd like, use Tatum's interview protocol with students. Come back together with your study group and discuss your experience, how it impacted your thinking, and how you might move forward from here.