

# TEACHING TOLERANCE



A PROJECT OF THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER  
TOLERANCE.ORG

UPPER GRADES ACTIVITY

K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

James Baldwin: Art, Sexuality and Civil Rights

## Final Interpretations

Read the four passages as a class. As each is read aloud, underline important words or phrases. Discuss each excerpt. Then record your final thoughts and interpretation about James Baldwin.



Author James Baldwin is shown, Aug. 1967. (AP Photo)

### QUOTE

### YOUR FINAL INTERPRETATION

1. “A spokesman assumes that he is speaking for others,” he told Julius Lester, a faculty colleague at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, in an interview in *The New York Times Sunday Book Review* in 1984. “I never assumed that I could. What I tried to do, or to interpret and make clear, was that no society can smash the social contract and be exempt from the consequences, and the consequences are chaos for everybody in the society.”

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2. “I was a maverick, a maverick in the sense that I depended on neither the white world nor the black world,” he told Lester. “That was the only way I could’ve played it. I would’ve been broken otherwise. I had to say, ‘A curse on both your houses.’ The fact that I went to Europe so early is probably what saved me. It gave me another touchstone—myself.”

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3. "*Mountain* is the book I had to write if I was ever going to write anything else," he said. "I had to deal with what hurt me most. I had to deal, above all, with my father. He was my model. I learned a lot from him. Nobody's ever frightened me since."

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4. "Any real artist," he said, "will never be judged in the time of his time; whatever judgment is delivered in the time of his time cannot be trusted."

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