Section Two: Challenging Generalizations

From the physical to the political, Baldwin uses generalization—making a general point out of a single example or personal experience—to underscore the differences that exist among people, especially between whites and blacks. In doing so, he forces the thoughtful reader to confront his or her own preconceptions and prejudices. However, misunderstood or poorly explained generalizations can also be the cause of prejudice. It is important for the critical reader to challenge generalizations.

For each category listed below, write in the box a quality, attribute, relationship, or need shared by human beings of all colors and creeds.

1. Physical
   - Need for food and shelter.
   - Universal experience of pain.

2. Emotional

3. Social

4. Religious

5. Intellectual

FOLLOW-UP: In which of the categories listed above do you think Baldwin’s generalizations are positive and optimistic?
VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT: VERIFYING MEANINGS BY EXAMPLES
The best way to own a new word is to use it. Use complete sentences to answer these questions about the vocabulary words:

1. What does it mean to be implacable (p. 17) on an issue?
2. What does a peremptory (p. 18) tone in a voice sound like?
3. How could a friend be assuaged (p. 22)?
4. What is the opposite of an inexorable (p. 26) position?