

# **Monster: The Autobiography of an L.A. Gang Member Study Guide**

**Monster: The Autobiography of an L.A. Gang Member  
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# Plot Summary

Kody Scott's story begins on June 15, 1975. He is graduating sixth grade but his pride in the day comes because it's the day he's to be initiated into a neighborhood gang, the Tray Eights, which is a "set" of the Crips. He recalls that he'd been proud of himself just weeks prior to graduation because he'd flashed a gang sign in a school photo. He says the fact that he'd done it - knowing he'd be caught - was the first sign that he'd become totally devoted to the gang. It would take more than a decade for him to come to the conclusion that his life must change.

Kody's devotion to the Crips is unsurpassed. He says that he is only happy when he is working for the gang. "Working" may mean anything from painting graffiti on walls advertising the gang or specific gang members or heading up an attack on another gang. Kody himself performs such acts of atrocity that he becomes known as "Monster," or "Monster Kody." From the night of his initiation, he proves that he is willing to kill for the gang and that dedication doesn't change for many years. Though Kody is not specific in the number of people he kills, he does detail his role in many shootings. Often, these are done in retaliation for attacks by other gangs. Kody agrees with those who say that the worst enemy of Crips are other Crips.

Through his life, his mother does her best to raise him and it's not until he's approaching adulthood that she tells him the man he's known as father is not his biological father. Kody never connects with either man and that fact drives him to be a good father to his own children, though that's not the case from the beginning.

Kody is involved with a girl from his gang named China when he meets an "outsider" named Tamu. He admits that the fact that he isn't a gang member when he's with her is part of the infatuation. They are close until she becomes pregnant and Kody, fearing fatherhood and the commitment it brings, abandons Tamu and the daughter she gives birth to.

Kody's diligence to his own gang puts him on the "hit lists" of others. He is set up by three girls and shot multiple times. The resulting hospital stay and recovery are time consuming and Kody is soon incarcerated. During that jail stay, he's rushed back for emergency surgery related to the earlier shooting. He's later shot again in the back that doesn't do a fraction of the damage of the first event. Over the years, he's arrested several times, charged for an array of crimes including murder, and manages to escape the charges until he's finally sentenced to seven years.

It's during his prison stay that he learns of a plan for an emerging syndication of the Crips and that he has done so much violence against other sets within the Crips that he must either pledge allegiance to this new organization or be killed. He does join, though with reservations and soon distances himself from the gang altogether. He eventually sees the advantages of respectability, gets a job and takes responsibility for Tamu and their children. His ideology regarding gangs changes to the point that he sees the error

of his actions as a gangbanger. He says that he believes in separatism and that he believes, in the end, multiculturalism will fail.



# Initiation

## Initiation Summary and Analysis

Kody Scott's story begins on June 15, 1975. He is graduating sixth grade but his pride in the day comes because it's the day he's to be initiated into a neighborhood gang, the Tray Eights, which is a branch of the Crips. He recalls that he'd been proud of himself just weeks prior to graduation because he'd flashed a gang sign in a school photo, prompting a suspension and a lecture on the fact that he was headed for "moral decay." On this day, Kody goes with Tray Ball, a gangbanger who agrees to be Kody's sponsor in his quest to gain admittance into the Crips.

On the night of Kody's initiation, he goes "to work" with G.C. who is the "expert" car thief among the members. Kody is given a gun while G.C. steals a Mustang. He says that he was an excellent sentry and was fully prepared to empty his gun into the house or any movement he saw during the theft. When they are in the car, a light comes on in the house and G.C. holds Kody back from leaping out of the car and shooting.

Kody's initiation includes being severely beaten by two of the members, Huck and Lep. He says he had known it would happen but hadn't really expected that it would happen to him. He keeps his feet though it's mostly because he's hit again before he can sag to the floor and the beating abruptly ends when Tray Ball announces that it's time to leave. They give Kody a pump shotgun, remind him that he can't ever "snitch" and that he isn't to return to the car until his gun is empty, then head out to meet another gang, the Bloods. They find a group outside a house. They all empty their guns into the group and Kody says that he noticed the grotesque shapes of those who had fallen to the ground.

Three years later, Tray Ball is "captured" by police and sent to jail. Kody notes that he still has the others in his set but that they weren't as interested in working for the gang as they had been. That's why he goes looking for another "road dog," or best friend. He finds a teen named Crazy De who understands Kody's bloodlust and his desire to work for the gang. They both aspire to become "ghetto stars," or gangbangers who are known for their activities. By now, Kody has become known as "Monster," or "Monster Kody," and says that he is vicious in his attempts to live up to his name.

One day, Kody, Crazy De and some bangers from the Rollin' Sixties were headed to the skating rink when they happened upon two from Kody's set running away from the scene of a shooting. Kody and the others are mistaken for the shooters and chased, eventually cornered in a store and beaten severely before the police arrive. Kody is falsely identified as one of the shooters and jailed again. Three months later he goes to trial. Kody notes that he doesn't understand the thinking behind the court case because the killing had been - in gang terms - "legal." Then the gangbanger who had been shot testifies and says that Kody isn't the one who shot him, prompting the judge to dismiss the case. That night, Kody leads an initiation run and kills two people.



At fifteen, Kody steals a car, is too drunk to drive and is immediately captured and jailed. His sister, Kendis, perjures herself with the lie that Kody was at home at the time but he's still found guilty and spends nine months at a juvenile facility known as Camp Munz. When he arrives home, the gangs are fully at war and his little brother - who'll become known as "Li'l Monster" - has joined the gang. Kody begins going steady with a female member of the Tray Eights named China.

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The story begins with a preface that describes a war scene, including helicopters and troop movement. It's made to sound like a foreign war zone but it's South Central, the area of Las Angeles, California, where Kody Scott grows up and where he becomes heavily involved in the gang wars.

After Kody's initiation run, Tray Ball tells him that gangbanging is a full-time job. It's advice Kody will take to heart and he will eventually come to realize that his gang means more to him than anything, even his own family. At home that night, Kody thinks about what he's done. He admits that he sleeps little while thinking about it and that he tries to rationalize his role in it, but can't.

Kody describes an altercation during which his younger brother is told to pick up a piece of paper but refuses, saying it isn't his. Kody pulls out his gun but he and his brother argue over who is going to shoot. During the wrestling match over the gun, it is aimed at his mother and someone pulls the trigger but there isn't a round in the chamber. The next day, Kody has an encounter with someone but notes that his mother is searching him and he can't get out of the house with his gun. A few days later, he manages to fire six rounds into the man's workplace but doesn't kill him. Kody gets sixty days in juvenile detention, serves a third of that and says that it boosted his reputation. The role of parents in this situation varies and there will even come a point where one mother of a murdered gang banger orders Kody and others to seek revenge.

Kody notes that the number one killer of Crips is actually other Crips and that the battles between Crips and Bloods are not nearly as serious as the battles among sets of the Crips. He also writes about the duties of a gang member, saying that they are responsible for bringing guns into the set and most have specific jobs. Those who present the military front are typically most notorious and respected. Despite Kody's diligence toward his duty, he simply doesn't advance as quickly as he'd wanted in the ranks of the gang.



# Boys to Men

## Boys to Men Summary and Analysis

Kody is at China's home, listening to her grandfather's speech on how young people are not doing what they should be doing when he hears a gunshot. He leaps off the porch and runs toward the sound, pulling his own weapon as he goes. He empties his gun on a Cutlass with a gun sticking out of the passenger's side window prompting the car to speed away. The car comes back by and Kody fears he'll be shot but then a police cruiser arrives and takes the Cutlass' passengers into custody. Kody says his people run to identify those being arrested, not to help the police but so that they would know where to seek their own revenge for the shooting. Back at China's house, her grandparents are angry that Kody ran toward the shots but don't realize he was also shooting. Later, Kody berates his own people for their slow response which allowed not only the first set of shots but a return pass with the intention of shooting again.

Through his brother and sister, Kerwin and Kendis, Kody meets Tamu. He says his attraction to her was largely that she wasn't part of the gang. When he's with her, he doesn't use his gang flag and avoids gang activities. He also hides his "strap," or gun. She is soon pregnant with his child and he's torn by the fact that he knows being with Tamu means he can no longer pledge his allegiance to the gang. He says that he doesn't know which to choose and continues to wrestle with the problem until the night she calls with the information that she's in labor. He agrees to go to the hospital to be with her but purposefully drives around in rival gang territory hoping to encounter a reason for a fight. He finds a member of the Sixties called "Bank Robber" walking alone, calls him to the car and shoots him. Kody notes that he suddenly feels free because with that action he has made his decision - he chose the gang over Tamu. She gives birth to a daughter, Keondra.

When Kody's friend "Twinky" is killed, the gang violence immediately escalates in retaliation. Kody notes that they earn news coverage over the coming days. After one shooting in which Kody and his gang shoot up another car and prompt them to crash into a telephone pole, Kody deliberately hits a rival gang member riding on a bicycle. He notes that he feels no guilt over this actions, only a sense of duty, and that the only times he couldn't sleep well were when he felt he hadn't worked diligently for his gang.

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In the summer of 1980, Kody's mother insists that he go with her to Buddah Market where she'd shopped many years earlier. The store is now in Rollin' Sixties turf but his mother insists. While there he encounters a rival gang member. Both draw their weapons and fire, and the rival is hit in the torso. Kody races back to his mother and urges her out of the store. He expects to be arrested but isn't. He notes that his mother hadn't, until this point, realized the seriousness of the gang war that was escalating



steadily. Immediately after the shots, she asks Kody if he had been involved and Kody admits that she's hoping it wasn't him but knows the truth already.

Kody's friend "Twinky" is with his girlfriend in October of 1980 and they're arguing because April wants to go home. Twinky sees a rival gang member's car and pulls his weapon to fire but April stops him, saying they aren't doing anything and he should just let them go on by. A few minutes later, they come up on him from behind and kill him. Twinky's real name is James and at three o'clock the following morning his mother calls Kody, screaming that her son was killed and calling for Kody to come to her house. At Twinky's house, there are guns on the coffee table. His mother says that the guns now belong to the gang. She then tells Kody that he and another member, Doc, are to go get revenge for her son's death or that they will never again be welcome in her home.

She then tells them to get in her car. She drives to April's house and empties a gun herself in the direction of the house. Kody notes that he started to go shoot with her but felt this was something she "needed" to do on her own. She believes April aided in Twinky's death and urges Kody to have her expelled from the gang. It's notable that Twinky's mother tells Kody that Twinky's younger brother is now afraid and wants to disassociate himself from the gang so she can't count on him for revenge. She doesn't seem to berate him for the decision and only tells Kody this when she's out of the house and away from her remaining son.





# The War

## The War Summary and Analysis

As 1980 draws to a close, the gang violence escalates with the Tray Eighties and the Rollin' Sixties fighting regularly. One night, Kody is heading home from a friend's house and cursing himself for staying so late and being without a weapon. On the way, he encounters a rival gang that takes time to identify him before opening fire. Those seconds spent trying to verify Kody's identity give him time to run and he makes it under a fellow gang member's car. The rivals shoot up the car but neither Kody nor the car's occupants are hit, though a bullet pierces the bill of Fatty's baseball cap. Kody notes that the car's occupants are high on PCP but that he has no "sedatives" in his system and he's shaken. Closer to home, he's shot at again and arrives at his house to find his sister in the yard. He screams at her to get inside, noting that in the rising violence kidnapping of family members would be commonplace.

Kody notes that there would typically be an immediate response mounted by his own gang for these attacks but on this particular night there's a "lull" in communication. He takes a sawed off shotgun and bikes to an area where he believes he can get revenge, then shoots on a group of rival gang members. He returns to where he left the bike and finds someone has stolen it, forcing Kody to make his way home on foot. He gets home and watches the Benny Hill show. The following night, Kody is arrested for murder, though it turns out to be a different attack against a rival gang member known as D.C. Kody knows he can't use his true alibi - that he'd been across town shooting at another group of rivals at the time. Kody's mother comes to see him on his second day in jail, asks what's happened to him to bring him to this point and Kody admits that, "for the first time in a while," he cries. He tells her that he doesn't know what's happened to him and admits to himself that it's true. He says no one had really known that the Crips would become so strong and that he hadn't even yet realized the complete hold the gang had over him. Kody remains in jail just three days and is released when the prosecution declines to try the case.

The day he arrives back home he discovers that a fellow gang member's sister had been kidnapped while visiting her brother in jail. Kody and others immediately begin to plan revenge but it's three days before the girl is found, raped and stabbed in a local school yard. She survives and Kody's group finds a rival member, chop off both his arms at the elbows, leave one arm in the gutter and take the other. Kody notes that the police are frustrated at the crime and the fact that they couldn't find the other arm, and that his gang had apparently made the point that some acts - the kidnapping of their female family members - wouldn't be tolerated.

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On more than one occasion, Kody notes that the makeup of a gang is as complex as any military organization. Not only are there people within the gang assigned specific



duties, but the gang itself is split into "sets." These sets sometimes go to war against each other, meaning that the gang is actually at war with itself. At one point, a rival gang member is slipping into Kody's territory intending to murder "Sidewinder," but the would-be murderer is accidentally shot by another rival gang member.

Kody writes about the fact that most "wars" that get media coverage include information about the reasons for the fighting. Without the ability to communicate their justifications, the gang's objectives are left to the imagination of the public. It's interesting that, though Kody never really says that shooting a rival gang member was the morally correct thing to do, he also conveys the sense that he felt completely justified in his actions at the time.

Kody is being bused to a "white" school called El Camino Real High. Though he goes to school every day, he never attends any classes. Then a rival gang is waiting when the bus comes through their area. The day the bus is shot up, Kody stops attending school.



# Ambush

## Ambush Summary and Analysis

As time passes, Kody is becoming more notorious and is actually on "hit lists" for several rival sets. Kody makes a plan to hit a store called Western Surplus on New Year's Eve, reasoning that there would be no one watching the store at that time. Kody has too much to drink that evening, shoots out a street light and watches as a fellow member, Joe Joe, is arrested with the gun Kody had been holding moments before. Then three girls, Yolanda, Pam, and Kim, arrive in a car and ask Kody to go with them to the Western Surplus, saying that if he's with them they know they won't be bothered by anyone else. Kody agrees to go but feels that something is wrong. When they see Li'l Hunchy - Pam's boyfriend - Kody insists that they stop and pick him up though Pam doesn't want to.

They arrive and Kody, thinking that he'd case the place in preparation of their hit later that night, gets out of the car though the girls remain inside. Kody encounters three men, all in their late twenties or thirties, but doesn't immediately suspect a problem. Kody realizes they want to fight and believes two against three is "winnable." Then one pulls a gun, Li'l Hunchy runs, and Kody is shot multiple times. Face down on the concrete, he watches as his blood runs down the sidewalk. Kody wakes in ICU three days later. He's undergone surgery, has a tube in his nose to drain his stomach, a broken arm from the gunshot, and is soon given another pain shot so that he is no longer conscious.

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The complexity of the gang alliances is an interesting phenomenon. Not only is it so detailed, but a group of people would obey the rules of this organization without any formal commitment. At one point, Kody and Crazy De come up with a plan to create sections within their gang set. Their idea was that if there was a "west side" section, and "east side," and so on, the enemy would have trouble deciding which of these sections should be held accountable for specific actions and attacked. Kody's idea is that they would all remain in the same set and that the name alone would be sufficient to confuse the enemy. Though the plan is dismissed by Sidewinder, a "ghetto star" who is considered a leader, Kody and Crazy De go forward with the plan and it works to some degree.

Kody notes that while recruits were heavily on the rise, the tendency within the gang was to abuse their own members. This treatment prompted recruits to drop out and created less-than-typical loyalty which the leaders much later realized was a serious mistake.

While Kody is open about his role in the actions, he seldom tells the fate of a particular victim. This is most notable when he says that he shot two rival gang members in

December of 1980, but that neither died. Up to this point, the reader may think that few - if any - of the others have died but this seems to make a distinction.



# Can't Stop, Won't Stop

## Can't Stop, Won't Stop Summary and Analysis

Kody wakes periodically over the next few days, has "lumps in his throat" over the thought of his stomach being held together with staples, and notes the pump keeping the poisons pumped from his stomach. He has open holes where he's taken bullets in his left leg and his back. After a few days in the hospital, Kody's gang is retaliating in such a ferocious way that the police come to him asking him to put a stop to it. Kody is proud of his gang for their action. His nurse, Eloise, has a son in a gang but doesn't say whether he's in Kody's set or a rival gang. One day, Eloise brings Kody a phone and the caller says only, "You ain't dead yet, tramp?!" Kody realizes that there will likely be another attempt on his life and a few days later the men who'd shot him arrive at his room. He pushes the call button for Eloise and when she arrives she tells the men to leave and then tells Kody that he'd better call in his own gang for protection. He calls his brother, Li'l Monster, who arrives a short time later. When they are certain the shooters have gone, they leave Kody with a gun that he then keeps under his pillow. The day he's discharged, his mother comes to pick him up and he leaves the hospital with the gun in his lap under a blanket.

The next day, Kody is informed that the police have arrested his shooter and he notes that it's futile to say they have the wrong man in custody. He and his little brother are eating breakfast when rival gang members drive by. The two grab guns and run outside, and the fact that Kody forgets to remove the safety is the only reason he doesn't shoot the driver while his mother and cousin watch from the front lawn. A short time later, the police arrive and he's arrested for another murder. Kody notes that many of those in jail with him in 1981 have since been gunned down or are in jail for their crimes. Among his fellow inmates at the time was Crazy De. A few days later Kody begins vomiting blood and is rushed back to the hospital for another operation. The day he arrives back in jail, his brother is being booked for murder.

A short time later, Kody is transferred. Upon his arrival, he's told that the cell block is filled with members of the Bloods and they promise to beat him the following morning. He notes that he never thought of denying his gang affiliation or running away but was prepared for a serious beating the following morning when the cell doors opened. When the time comes, he's met by fellow Crips and their story of being Bloods was a way to test his strength and dedication. A member named Cyco Mike was the leader and the two immediately clash. Cyco and Kody eventually fight and Cyco concedes leadership. Kody and his fellow gang members thoroughly abuse anyone not of their set to the point of making some drink urine, and the gang mentality soon becomes evident within the jail.

In June of 1981, Kody stands trial for murder. The witnesses describe the shooting, many saying he used both hands on the gun. When it's brought into evidence that Kody had just been released from the hospital on the day of this alleged shooting and that his



arm was still in a cast, the jury finds him not guilty. He says that before anything else - women, alcohol, or drugs - he wants revenge.

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Kody wakes in the hospital to nightmares of being shot again and is told that it's a normal reaction to having actually been shot but fears that his screams will damage his reputation. As he talks to a roommate - another shooting victim though he is an innocent bystander from the South who plans to go home upon his release from the hospital - Kody is forced to look at his life. He says that he continually rationalizes his actions as reactions to his situation but never delves too deeply because he knows he can't offer any legitimate explanations. He does say that in his mind there are two options: Be part of the gang or become a victim. He says that most gang members avoid killing innocent bystanders and that almost no shooting is random because that would mean an innocent bystander could be killed. Even with this, Kody believes that being alone - without the force of a gang behind him - would be equivalent of being a victim. He says that he can't stand the thought of that kind of life.

By the time of his shooting, he's been in the gang for five years and says that he has little respect for life, likening the lives of the young people in his neighborhood to "dog years." He talks about a friend, Lucky, murdered at fourteen who had lived so hard and so fast that even at that young age he'd needed a rest and so his tombstone reads, "My baby Brother taking a rest."

Kody will say that he has little in common with any of his family except his brother who follows him into the gang. When Kody calls on him to come to the hospital, he does so and then tells Kody that he will personally lead the retaliation on Kody's attackers. Kody notes that he and his mother have lost touch completely and at one point blames it on her generation but much later admits that it was he who changed. Immediately after his release from the hospital after his first gunshot, he goes out and his mother's concern about him is evident. It's interesting that she tells him to come inside and he refuses but his friends urge him to obey.

One of Kody's concerns is for his own ability to defend himself without a gun. He notes that the gang members have come to rely on weapons rather than their own prowess. He himself trains with weights while in jail and urges all his fellow gang members to do so as well. In addition, he begins having contests of strength among the gang members with the ultimate goal to bring the young men back to the point of being able to defend themselves with fists when the situation requires it.



# The Juvenile Tank

## The Juvenile Tank Summary and Analysis

As Kody is processed out of jail after his trial ends in an not guilty verdict, he reminds those remaining to keep the gang inside strong. Upon his release, he darts out and catches the first bus he finds, fearing that the police are tricking him and plan to now arrest him again. A member of a rival gang boards the bus a short time later, sees Kody and draws a gun from his waistband, and Kody fears for his life. When the boy asks Kody what gang he belongs to, Kody denies any affiliation but continues to plan his escape because he knows the rival member will see him for what he is. Then the other gang member gets off the bus, telling Kody that he should join a gang and that he already has the look of a gang member. Kody wants to scream at him that he has a gang but now knows that the information would be taken directly back to his own gang.

He soon discovers that he's on the wrong bus, ends up far from his home turf and takes some time making his way home. Once there, he knocks on the door of his house but gets no answer and visits a short time with a neighbor who offers marijuana. Kody, having had no drugs during his stay in jail, is soon very high. At home again, he bangs on the door and his mother turns on the porch light, prompting Kody to scream at her until she turns off the light and lets him in. She immediately believes he's escaped and says the police will come get him. Upon learning he's been legitimately released, she berates him for the marijuana which she can smell on his clothing. He goes to his room but is angry and slips out the window, armed and looking for someone to shoot. He finds three enemies, shoots at them, hears someone shout that he's hit and notes that one is motionless in the street.

Nightly, Kody and his fellow gang members go out on attacks. One night they are searching for a car and find a man washing his van. The man nervously says that he worked hard to buy the van but then Diamond pulls a gun. The man wrestles him for the weapon and takes it, forcing Kody's group to scatter. Kody is shot in the back and the group flags down the father of a girl in the gang for a ride, though Kody refuses to go to the hospital, insisting instead that he go to his mother's house. There, she gripes at Kody for allowing himself to get in that position but gathers her keys and takes him to the hospital.

At the hospital, Kody is kept in the waiting room while another patient is called back. His mother screams at a woman in the office, telling her that it's not fair that a white woman with a cold is taken before a man who has been shot. Kody is x-rayed and then two police officers arrive. He immediately notes that one of the officers is very high strung and enjoys making him angry by pretending to misunderstand the questions. Once they leave, Kody's mother asks why he lied about the incident and he says that if he'd told the truth he'd now be under arrest himself. His mother tells him that she doesn't understand and that he's killing her with his actions but he pretends to be asleep



through her tirade. He's kept in the hospital overnight though he isn't required to have another surgery.

When Kody returns home, he learns that fellow gang members have retaliated on his behalf, going so far as to shoot up the apartment where Kody's assailant is believed to live. Kody says that he regrets the extreme reaction but appreciates the concern it conveys. It's at this time that China tells him that she can't continue to be worried about him dying. Kody's response is that he's trying to make it safe for her but she tells him that he's taking it too far. She then reminds him that the last time he took her out it was in a stolen car, they encountered a rival gang and that she went to jail for her part in the events.

Kody is again arrested, this time on a robbery charge. Though he didn't do the robbery, police want to get him for something and he's convicted. He is sentenced to four years and Crazy De - his alleged accomplice - to five.

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Kody notes that gang members expect to be in prison sooner or later and that they seldom have problems adjusting to the atmosphere of prison life. He says that it's like getting wisdom teeth - if you live long enough, it's going to happen. He also notes that those who return to the gang from jail bring with them whatever they've learned while in prison - usually better ways to be a criminal. Those are all absorbed into the gang situation so that the gang evolves largely because it's members are put into jail populations with other criminals, learning things they would likely never have otherwise learned.

A law enforcement group feeds information to Kody and his fellow gang members about opposing gangs in order to facilitate the violence. Kody notes that they have three dead at the hands of enemy gangs and many wounded. Still they fight, using the violence against them as a reason to fight more.

At sixteen, Kody is sent to Youth Authority. His friend Eight Ball is murdered and Kody attacks a member of the killer's gang who happens to be incarcerated with him. This is typical of how the retaliation works. Simply by being associated with a gang, you are accepting responsibility for anything that gang does. It's also interesting that when Kody is taken into a section of the juvenile jail division where he would typically spend several weeks and be "processed" into the system, he's greeted with the information that many gang members coming in before him have talked about him, that they know he's committed many murders, and that he is going to be shipped directly on to a facility with tighter security.





# Muhammad Abdullah

## Muhammad Abdullah Summary and Analysis

Kody's little brother arrives at the youth facility while Kody is being held in maximum security. Kody, seeking to organize a revenge attack for the murder of a fellow gang member on the outside, sends words for his group to meet at the Islam services where he plans to plot a new attack. They begin talking among themselves as soon as the service leaders begin to show a film and are told to stop "disrespecting" the services or to leave. They leave and are caught outside the services without a staff escort, prompting them all to be moved to lock down. When the Muslim service leader backs up their story that he told them to leave, they're no longer in trouble for being on the grounds without a staff member.

Kody respects the leader's action and later apologizes for their behavior in the meeting. He gives Kody a pamphlet and he reluctantly takes it, saying that he has little use for religion and had always considered religious people to be victims unwilling to defend themselves. He's surprised to find a quote by Malcolm X that reads, "From here on in, if we must die anyway, we will die fighting back and we will not die alone. We intend to see that our racist oppressors also get a taste of death." Kody struggles to understand the word "oppressors," saying that he hadn't yet realized that he is oppressed, and to fit his enemies into the equation as presented by Malcolm X. Kody attends a service and is amazed that he hears explanations of his own life - including that the government seeks to eliminate those of color and therefore locks up young black men. He then learns that Tray Ball had been playing Russian roulette, had stepped out of the room and someone had fully loaded the gun, then Tray Ball returned and shot himself in the head. Kody's immediate response is that all those present must die but he hasn't the means to attack anyone while in jail and cries out his frustration over the following week. When the time comes for another Islam service, Kody and his little brother are in attendance.

Muhammad asks why they are in and points out to both that they are killing other blacks - a sure method of self-destruction of the black race. Kody says that message is so powerful that he sends word for his fellow gang members to attend and the nine who were usually in services suddenly became eighty, prompting concern among the staff. Staff members sit in on services but never realize why Kody and the others are drawn to the messages.

As Kody continues to attend services, to read the words of Malcolm X and Eldridge Cleaver, and to look at his own life, he meets Walter Brown who teaches classes on parole. It's Brown who tells Kody that the white man will lock him up just as the white man has locked Kody out of society. He says that with no marketable skills to make a living and the dangers of drugs, alcohol and gangbanging, Kody has little chance for survival. The Muhammad - the Islam leader who has reached so many of the black youth in the facility, is replaced by a man who preaches pacifism and is immediately shunned by those who had attended Muhammad's services. Kody later gets a letter from Muhammad who says that his messages had been taped and that's why he was



banned from the facility. The letter ends with a warning for Kody and the others to always watch for the interlopers who would try to look like them but would steer them wrong.

Over the coming months, Kody has his gang affiliation tattooed on his neck and then learns that C-Ball shot and killed fellow gang member Tray Stone. There is debate about what to do with C-Ball but he has been a member of their gang for many years and in the end no one made a definitive decision and nothing was done. Stone was eighteen and C-Ball was sentenced to jail for eight years. In March of 1984, Kody is released. His mother and Tamu come to pick him up.

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Kody arrives in the maximum security youth prison to find that the "lines of race" are clearly drawn. He's considered a serious offender and is kept on "The Rock" - a solitary lock-down within the facility - on a regular basis. He notes that the prison resembles a large, upscale college campus complete with a football field, track and boxing arena, but that the look is merely a façade for an ugly place. The fact that he is now considered a leader among the members of his gang has created some changes for Kody. For example, when a rival gang member "disses" Kody's gang, he orders a fellow gang member to teach that rival a lesson - and the order is carried out. When he becomes caught up in the message of Muhammad, Kody cancels a planned hit as a retaliation for Tray Ball's death. When questioned about the motive, he can't explain and says only that they'll take it up later.

As Kody struggles to reconcile his own life to that preached by the Islam faith, he admits that the only reason the message appealed to him was because he was in prison. He says that he doesn't believe there is a God or that his shooting someone was "predestined" by God. Kody also tries to analyze himself. He says that on one level he loves being "Monster Kody" and that holding the power of life and death over another is something he probably can't give up. He admits that having other kinds of power - the power of ownership of something substantial such as land, for example - never crossed his mind. It's in this time that he reads "Soul on Ice," by Eldridge Cleaver.



# Tamu

## Tamu Summary and Analysis

Kody is afraid during the trip home. Having spent three years in lock up he's unaccustomed to going fifty-five miles per hour and fears that he'll die in a wreck before reaching his beloved 'hood. They do arrive and there are about a dozen gang members waiting to welcome him, though he recognizes only a few. Two agree to bring him a gun, his mother goes to bed and Kody and Tamu go out to eat. Tamu discovers that she's ten dollars short when it's time to pay and Kody says that having no money of his own is embarrassing. They go back to Tamu's house, get the ten needed to pay the tab and then spend the night in a motel. Tamu wants Kody to share an apartment with her and urges him to get a job as soon as possible. He says that he has no intention of doing so but follows his mother's order to visit a man who's promised Kody a job. He is sent out as a recruiter for students of a computer school but Kody spends his first day watching the lines at the employment office and doesn't approach anyone. He quits after the second day and hooks up with a friend who is selling dope. With that immediate cash flow, he does get an apartment with Tamu and their daughter, Keondra.

Then Kody gets a visit from Muhammad who tells him that he's been accused of preaching subversive messages, which is why he was banned from the prison. Kody attends a service with Muhammad and feels completely out of place in his gangster attire.

Kody reconnects with an old friend, Huck, and then encounters Joker who says that he'd been at a party in Hoover territory the previous night, that he'd been high, and that a Hoover named Macc had beaten him. Kody's gang and the Hoovers have traditionally been allies. Kody, Joker and six fellow gang members go to Hoover territory where Joker and Macc have a fistfight which Joker wins easily. Macc doesn't want to let it go and Kody says that they can fight again, but the following week in Kody's territory. The news of the fight spreads as Kody's gang expects there to be an all-out gang rumble between the two, prompting three generations of gang members - many who haven't been active in years - to show up at the appointed time and place. However, Macc appears with only three of his gang, all beaten and sharing the news that they were preparing to retaliate on the Rollin' Sixties. The fight between Kody's group and the Hoovers is forgotten as they join to fight the Rollin' Sixties instead.

Kody spends another afternoon with Muhammad and begins reading the book about Fred Hampton, leader of the Black Panthers. Soon after, Kody is arrested when police search his home and find a gun. He is charged with mayhem and attempted murder. Kody notes that the staff are "so complacent" that members of the same gang are allowed to share a cell, meaning that there's "always something going on."

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Muhammad tells Kody of the concept that Africa is the "motherland," that "hue-man" means man of color, and that the black man is the norm while those who developed outside the "womb" of the motherland developed albinism.

Kody finds himself the target of a group looking for him. He sees them first, lies in wait and ambushes them. Back home, he plans another assault and then spends some time with Keondra watching cartoons. He says that he's very quiet and Tamu asks what's wrong. He says nothing but knows that he's now back in the thick of the gang mentality and that he'll quickly be to the point of no return.

Kody knows that a rival gang member named Keith was in on the attempt on his life and encounters him at the house of April, the same girl who had been with Twinky the night of his death. Keith knows he might be killed and tells Kody that it's become a fact among some sets that Kody's death would be for the "betterment of the Crip Nation" as a new "syndicate" is being formed. Later, Kody considers that the terminology isn't typical of gangs and that he can't possibly defend himself when he has no clue who is coming for him.



# 48 Hours

## 48 Hours Summary and Analysis

The L.A. County Jail includes a module set aside for Crips. Kody says that general population was preferable to the Crips' module for several reasons. The Crips had no access to reading material, the noise and stress level were high, and Crips weren't allowed to move about without heavy security. Even so, when anyone of those in the module saw a fellow gang member in general population, he was pointed out immediately. Kody says it wasn't malicious but merely an effort by gang members to strengthen their set and a way to bring other Crips "home" since the module was serving as a temporary "hood."

The 4800 module becomes known as "48 Hours" because those who manage to survive the first two days have a better chance of long-term survival. After gang members are rearranged, Kody finds himself in the cell with Fat Rat who brutalizes another gangbanger known as B.T. Kody watches the entire situation until Fat Rat prepares to rape B.T., only then stopping the violence. Though Kody hadn't participated in the beating, he and Fat Rat are both sent to solitary confinement for ten days.

When he arrives back in the module, he immediately notes that something has obviously changed. He soon finds that a gang member named Killer is a proponent of this new syndication that he's heard about. He notes that the members of this new group are respectful and quiet, using words such as "please" often and without seeming concerned about their own reputation. It's Killer who says the goal is to remake the Crips into the CRIPS - the Clandestine Revolutionary Internationalist Party Soldiers and that they won't fight against the United Blood Nation - known as the Bloods. Killer says that the Crips are their "own worst enemy" and that things have to change if they're to survive. The new power, the Consolidated Crip Organization, has new ideas and begin teaching those who'll listen about military science, political science and the history of the Crips. Those who won't listen are "dealt with and removed." Kody notes that the tribalism among the gang members inside the prison comes to a halt and instead of shouting insults at each other, the gang members chant the Universal Crip Cadence, also called Machine in Motion. It contains language such as "soldiers," "lost one, kill two," and "kill the Klan."

In this new-found brotherhood, it's discovered that there's an informant in their midst and the prisoners, on instruction from the C.C.O., refuse to confirm their prison identification numbers. Kody begins the Machine in Motion chant and is taken from his cell though he refuses to submit until the chant is complete. He has a fight with the guards and is taken to maximum security where he meets Suma, a general of the C.C.O. Suma asks him to join them and when Kody asks for time to consider the offer, Suma says that Kody has done too much damage to black men - that he must join or he'll be "destroyed for the good of the C-Nation." While Kody admits to pressure, he says that the decision to join was still his own. He soon encounters a member of a rival



set that he considered an enemy and prepares to stab the man but finds him remarkably calm and humble. Kody later learns that the stabbing would have been "a costly mistake." Kody soon leaves the county jail for the state prison.

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The 4800 module of the county jail was home to the Crips. Because of a riot in 1984, the Crips were forced to wear gray jumpsuits - singling them out from the rest of the population wearing blue. Even the Bloods wear normal jumpsuits meaning they know the Crips on sight, just as would be the case in the neighborhoods where gangs were common. The difference here is that the Bloods are camouflaged, wearing normal prison garb.

There's a major fight among the gang sets, then all prisoners are told to gather their personal belongings and go to the shower. They wait there for awhile and are eventually reassigned. Kody says that it seems the goal was to house no more than one member from a particular set in a single cell. The mixing of these sets almost seems to be experimentation on the part of the prison officials. The result is that none of the gang members can come to a point where he feels secure. Kody says that they all continue to search for the sense of unity that exists in their own neighborhoods surrounded by nothing but their own gang members.



# Reconnected

## Reconnected Summary and Analysis

He's then sent to Soledad where he's to serve his remaining time. The first person he meets there is Li'l Rat who quizzes Kody about the new organization and agrees to think about whether he wants to be involved as well. Then Kody encounters a fellow gang member named Rattone, who criticizes Kody for his allegiance to the larger syndicate idea. Rattone says that the neighborhood set was good enough for Kody until he came to jail. Kody points out that there are only a few members of rival gangs in their area of the prison but many of the Mexicans. Kody says that he was born black and proud of that fact, that he'll always be an Eight Tray, but that he is no longer willing to fight other sets.

He is soon transferred to San Quentin where he begins his "transformation." Those who know him as "Monster Kody" are instructed to call him by his Kiswahili name, Sanyika. He'll later explain that the name means "unifier."

Under the control of the O.C.C., there are many rules implemented upon those of Kody's assigned tier of cells than are ordered by the prison officials. Foul language in reference to African men and women was not tolerated and no English spoken after six P.M. There is mandatory daily study time, members read specific books and are then required to answer questions about what they've read and to write a book report. Kody notes that he's given no special treatment and fails many times. He simply keeps trying.

Kody gets into the evolving culture of the C.C.O. He says that he questions their ultimate goals and that there are no leaders who can outline them for him. In Kody's mind, the gang leaders are operating under the assumption that they won't need those answers for many years rather than looking at the more immediate future. Kody also questions the leadership decisions in the case of his friend, Joker. Joker hits a C.C.O. member who is himself out of bounds and Joker's mother and brother are murdered in retaliation. Kody argues that Joker - who has not allied himself with the C.C.O. - was not in the wrong and that the murders were unwarranted. While Kody doesn't question the aptitude, knowledge, or power of those in charge of the C.C.O., he does question aspects of the organization.

It's interesting that as Kody begins to explain and explore the makeup of the C.C.O., he says that he believes the leaders are making the exact same mistakes as were made with the Black Panthers generations earlier. The goal of the C.C.O. was to end black-on-black violence but there are alternative groups emerging, led by those who don't agree with the teachings or ideals of the C.C.O. One of those is the B.N.C.O. - Blue Note Crip Organization. Kody says that it gained a large following very quickly because it appealed to the gang mentality. Meanwhile, the Mexicans are "winning the war" in Folsom. The C.C.O. agrees to peace terms with the Mexicans but then begins a war with the B.N.C.O. Through all this, Kody continues to question the organization,





ideology, and goals until he's introduced to the New Afrikan Independence Movement through letters from Akiba Dhoruba Shakur, known to Kody as Adimu. In 1987, he's moved to Folsom, leaves the Crips and aligns himself with the Independence Movement.

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Kody is quickly ascended through the ranks of the O.C.C. and soon becomes second in command. It's interesting that the hierarchy seems very similar to that of military organizations. Though these men are all in prison, they work out schedules, arrange meetings, and converse with inmates in other prisons for orders. There are, however, those who don't see the bigger picture. The gang mentality continues to be a factor in the lives of many. Kody arranges security for those under his supervision. They are never allowed to leave their cells with shower shoes on as these put them outside with less protection than adequate footwear. There are knives in the possession of specific members at all times and these members placed in strategic locations to be available if a fight were to occur or an attack were forthcoming. No one showers without someone watching the door to provide security. While Kody is caught up in these preparations and military tactics, he soon finds that others don't see the seriousness of the duties they've been assigned. When he finds one member watching television while supposedly providing security for a fellow member taking a shower, Kody erupts, slapping the man and berating him. He later apologizes for doing so in public.

Kody recounts a story of his days in the height of the gang wars. He had been walking China home and was without a gun when Lunatic and his fellow gang members encountered Kody and China. Kody had no gun on him and Lunatic's crew briefly discuss what to do with the two, considering taking China from Kody or killing them both. In the end, it's Lunatic who convinces his fellow gang members to simply drive away without doing anything. A few weeks later, Tray Stone captures Lunatic and Kody grudgingly admits that he owes Lunatic a favor and orders that he be allowed to leave unharmed. Upon his arrival in San Quentin, Kody discovers that Lunatic occupies one of the nearby cells.

It's during Kody's stay in San Quentin that Tamu sends him the address for his real father. Kody reveals that his mother had told him that the man she'd been married to was not Kody's father. She says that they'd briefly split up and that she had an affair with a ball player named Dick Bass. Kody says that it explains the fact that the man his mother was married to - and who Kody believed to be his father - seemed to dislike Kody. When the man, Mr. Scott, took the other children to visit his mother, Kody's mother would pretend to want Kody's presence. She called him her favorite and tried to make up for his lack of relationship with Mr. Scott. Now Kody says that he wants to try to write to his biological father but can't find the words. His one consolation is that Ray Charles is his godfather and that he never lacked for new toys.





# Nation Time

## Nation Time Summary and Analysis

Kody begins to distance himself from both the Crips and Bloods and says that creating an image of himself away from the gangs was much like creating an image for himself as a gang member. Over time, with Kody steadfastly avoiding any conflict that doesn't have to do with race, others begin to accept his new position. He says that the trap for many is that the pull of gang membership and the security of the familiar is too strong. He says that equally important is that fellow gang members feel betrayed, making those who would quit ashamed to fail in their duty to their fellow gang members and to those who fought and died to create the gang and to make it strong. However, Kody has a driving reason for quitting; he says that he can't possibly teach his children morals unless he himself is living a moral life.

After serving almost five years of his sentence, Kody is paroled. He arrives in Los Angeles by plane and is immediately accosted by police - pigs - who demand to know what he has in his bag and where he's coming from. When they find that he's just been released from prison, they say "welcome home, nigger," and walk away. Kody's brother, Kerwin, takes Kody to the bar where his mother works. They share a tearful greeting and Kody says that he suddenly realizes that she had a hard job, raising her children alone and watching Kody and Kershaun - Li'l Monster - in and out of trouble, court and jail.

Drugs are rampant and Kody says that most people sell in one capacity or another. He refuses, gets a job as a clerk and rises quickly to assistant loan adviser, and admits that working isn't as horrible as he'd expected. He says that in prison, the ideal was that black men would not work for a white oppressor. In the real world, he needed a job. He and Tamu live apart during the week, have one old car between them, but manage to support themselves and their family which now includes a second child, a son, Justin.

Kody and Tamu become closer, despite the fact that they're apart all week. One weekend they are out driving in the Rialto area when they're stopped. An officer demands Kody's identification and he refuses, saying he's not driving and there's no need to check him. The fact that they have the children in the car and he doesn't want Keondra to see him pulled from the car at gunpoint prompts him to give up his license which has the name he's chosen for himself, Sanyika Shakur. The officer demands his real name and Kody adamantly refuses to say anything other than Sanyika Shakur. Since the name has been changed legally, he is telling the truth. When the man continues to insist, Keondra tells Kody that the officer wants to know the name "mommy calls you." Kody says he knows that she's young and didn't realize what she'd done, but he later has a talk with her. When the officer checks on Kody Scott, he learns that Kody is outside his parole area and warns him that he'll be arrested the next time he's found there. Despite that warning, Kody later finds a job in Rialto, saying that he has an obligation to spend time with his family.



While Kody is working to get his life on track, Crazy De is in jail and often begs Kody to visit him there. Kody continues to put it off until the day Crazy De's mother, Alma, comes to pick him up to go with her. While he waits his turn to visit Crazy De, Kody remembers all the times the two spent together. De says that he was caught for kidnapping and two murders and predicts that he's to be executed. He says that he sold his life for dope and urges Kody not to make the same mistake. He then says that he respects Kody's decision to leave the gang but that he himself remains committed. Kody knows that he was fortunate in his ability to break free. As their visit is terminated, Kody holds up a fistful hand, the sign of the Movement, while Crazy De shows the sign of the Eight Trays - the final sign that the bond between the two as it applies to gang affiliation is broken. Kody says that "gangsterism" continues and that he'll remain committed to ending the causes.

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It's here that Kody admits that he's done terrible things during his time in the gang and that he's not proud of any of those things, but says that he no longer wants destruction as his way of life. He says that he feels the need to construct something and that construction is "tantamount to treason" among those in gangs.

Once at home, Kody discovers that he has trouble telling about his decisions because the path is still so new to him. His family seems relieved that his first words are not traditional gang talk but also seem skeptical about the changes they see in him. His fellow gang members start dropping by, several giving him cash. He finds that his brother is unable to sum up what's happening with the gangs, that the politics between sets is more complex and fragile than ever, and that everything is more high-tech. The guns are high-powered and pagers are a common way to share and spread information. Kody says it's as if he started this happening but slept through the transformation to wake like Rip Van Winkle.



# Epilogue

## Epilogue Summary and Analysis

In 1991, Kody is captured for auto theft after beating up a drug dealer and taking the van he used for dealing. The dealer turned out to be a police informant and Kody wound up in jail. He admits that he is "responsible for deeds that have caused irreparable damage, such as the taking of life." He says that circumstances seemed to dictate his actions at the time but that he's not blaming outside forces for his decisions. Over the years, Kershaun has given up drug dealing, is married and has a child and Kody says that having the child has given Kershaun a wake-up call regarding his responsibilities.

Kody says he applauds the formal cease fire between the Bloods and Crips, but that there remains the issue of Crips fighting their own. He says that the children deserve happy childhoods while the gang members are caught up in a situation that spirals out of control, leaving death in its wake. He says that he fears a situation such as was seen in Bosnia, that multiculturalism will fail, and that he personally supports separatism.



# Characters

## Kody Scott

Kody Scott was eleven years old when he joined the Eight Tray Gangster set of the Crips. His initiation called for him to join an attack on a rival set and he did so, obeying the instruction that he was not to return to the car until his gun was empty. He admits that he didn't sleep well that night but eventually came to the point of not questioning whether his actions were right or moral - anything that was good for the gang was approved by Kody. He makes his way through the ranks, eventually becoming a recognized leader. He becomes known as "Monster Kody" because of the atrocities he personally performed.

The birth of his daughter, Keondra, fails to inspire Kody to fatherhood or to take responsibility for himself and his family. Even being shot twice - once seriously - he continues his "gangbanging" until he is sent to prison for a seven-year term. It's while he's in prison that Kody comes to question things in his life. He's faced with the harsh reality that the main killer of members of the Crips are other members of the Crips. He is told that unless he joins the newly-formed syndicate which is aimed at harmony among all sets of the Crips, he'll be killed. Though he says he felt pressure to join the new organization, he says the final decision was still his own. He does join but soon begins to question aspects of the new organization. With those questions unanswered, he turns away from the gangs and into a new awareness of himself as a black man and as a member of an oppressed society.

## Crazy De

Crazy De becomes Kody's "road dog" - or best friend - after Tray Ball is captured and jailed. Kody notes that Crazy De understands his blood lust and his desire to make a name for himself among the gang members. It's Crazy De who enters into a pact with Kody to "never stop until we have killed all of our enemies." Crazy De is in jail as Kody brings his book to a close and says that he expects to be executed for his crimes. He tells Kody that he will be true to the gang though he respects Kody's decision to leave it behind.

## Kershaun Scott

Kershaun is Kody's younger brother and the one of his siblings that follows him deep into the gang culture. Kershaun becomes known as "Li'l Monster." Kody says that a group of younger members, including Kershaun, are being molded into a fighting unit just before Kody is shot. When Kody is faced with his attackers again, it's Kershaun he calls on. Kershaun promises Kody retaliation. Kershaun follows in Kody's footsteps to the point that the brothers are in jail at the same time on more than one occasion.



Kershaun also spends a period of time selling drugs. Kershaun, like Kody, turns his life around eventually, marries and has a child.

## Tamu

Tamu is not a member of the Crips and Kody admits that's one of the things that attracts him to her. Tamu seems to recognize the good in Kody though she is faced with the fallout of his actions as he's taken from her life to spend time in jail. Even though Kody opts to handle gang business on the night Tamu gives birth, she holds onto her love for him. Tamu herself seems to seek responsibility and respectability. She holds a job and waits while Kody completes a jail term.

## China

The girl who becomes Kody's steady girlfriend while he is still a young teenager. Kody later becomes involved with another girl but fears that relationship as requiring more dedication than he can give and returns to China. China herself is involved in the gang and is often used for all sorts of gang activity. China and Kody eventually drift apart and Kody notes that they seem to have nothing left in common after his four year absence, time spent in jail.

## Birdie M. Scott

Kody's mother. Birdie seems able to only watch as Kody falls deeper into the gang mentality. Though their relationship deteriorates seriously, Kody insists on going home rather than to the hospital after having been shot in the back. His mother shows little concern, instead berating him for being in the situation that allowed him to be shot for the second time.

## Muhammad

Muhammad is a teacher at the prison and it's from Muhammad that Kody learns there are other things to think about than gangbanging. Muhammad points out the writings of Malcolm X and Eldridge Cleaver, prompting Kody to begin looking at his life and to form his own opinions. It's through the teaching that began with Muhammad that Kody changes his name to Sanyika Shakur.

## Tray Ball

The gang member who "sponsored" Kody as a member of the gang. Tray is killed while playing Russian Roulette. Kody is devastated by his friend's death and seems to wonder if it was a purposeful suicide.



## **Eloise**

Kody's nurse while he's recovering from his first gunshot. Eloise says that her son is also in a gang, but never tells Kody whether it's his set or a rival and he briefly fears that she might tell her son about Kody's weakened condition, prompting another attack on his life while he's in the hospital. He soon dismisses that because of Eloise's attitude and comes to depend on her. When the men who'd shot Kody return to his room, Eloise tells them to leave but then tells Kody that he'd better call his own gang for protection.

## **Walter Brown**

The man who teaches "parole classes" at the youth prison where Kody is incarcerated. Kody says that Brown demanded respect simply by his presence and was among the first to teach him that communication need not happen at the end of a gun.



## **Objects/Places**

### **Fifty-Fourth Street Elementary School**

Where Kody graduates sixth grade just before his gang initiation.

### **Bob's Big Boy**

Where Kody's mom, aunt and uncle take him to celebrate his sixth grade graduation.

### **Eight Tray Gangsters**

The "set" within the gang that Kody belongs to.

### **Ghetto Star**

A neighborhood "celebrity" known for actions such as gangbanging and dealing drugs.

### **Set**

A set is a group of gang members that belong to a larger group. Sets sometimes war with each other though technically under the umbrella of the mother organization.

### **Road Dog**

A best friend and cohort who is also a gang member.

### **Buddah Market**

A store in rival gang territory where Kody goes with his mother, encounters a rival gang member and shoots him.

### **Thirty-second Street Market**

Where Kody's brother and sister, Kerwin and Kendis, work and where he meets Tamu, the girl who becomes pregnant with his child.



## **Western Surplus**

The store where Kody's group hopes to get guns on New Year's Eve and the place where Kody is shot for the first time.

## **Chino State Prison**

Where Kody is sent to begin a seven-year term in 1985.

## **Soledad Prison**

Where Kody was incarcerated to serve out the remainder of his seven-year term. He stays only a brief time before being sent to San Quentin and later to Folsom.





# Themes

## Loyalty

Considering the loyalty that is typically inspired by the gang mentality, it's little wonder that loyalty is one of the overriding themes of this book. Those unfamiliar with the ideals upheld by gangs may find that loyalty misplaced. One of the most outstanding examples of this kind of loyalty occurs when Kody is shot. After the first incident, his fellow gang members immediately rally and mount attacks on those responsible for Kody's injuries. The result is an immediate escalation in the violence to the point that police call on Kody to stop it. After Kody is shot the second time, fellow gang members go to the apartment building of the man who shot Kody and shoot up the entire building. While Kody admits that the reaction was rather extreme, he appreciates the fact that his friends were willing to retaliate on his behalf. Kody himself says that the loyalty to the gang displaces everything - even family. When Tamu is in the hospital giving birth to Kody's daughter, Kody remains on the streets. He says that he knows he has no room for both Tamu and the gang in his life and the loyalty he feels toward his gang wins over whatever he feels for Tamu.

## Coming of Age

Kody is only eleven when he is initiated into the Crips and participates in an attack that results in deaths. He ages in many ways over the coming decade, making this book a prime example of the "coming of age" theme. One of the points to remember about Kody is that he is literally a child when he is initiated into the gang. As such a young boy, he is exceptionally impressionable. It's a friend who tells him that the gang requires all of his time, heart, and energy and Kody accepts that as fact because it's an older, established gang member who tells him of it. It seems at least possible that Kody would have turned in some other direction if he had had positive role models directing him that way. As time passes, Kody becomes more aware that he's followed in the footsteps of gang members and eventually loses the ability to shove his moral questions aside. This is a sign of maturity and it is eventually the reason he gives up the gang in favor of his family. The idea of a family and of having responsibility for a child had frightened him when Keondra was born. Later, it becomes the driving force in his life, prompting him to make specific decisions and take specific actions that would have been unthinkable to Kody as an immature, gangbanging teen.

## The Impotence of Family

There have been many studies that cite the fact that gangs become a surrogate family for its members, and that sense of belonging is the reason so many young people devote themselves to a gang. That's likely true in Kody's case, at least to some degree. Kody himself desires to be part of his own family and writes of both the disjointed family



life and the fact that both his biological and adoptive fathers shunned him. Kody says that his siblings tend to pair off and that he remains close to Kershaun largely because Kershaun follows Kody into the gang life. The two are even in jail together on several occasions. After Kody leaves the gang, Kershaun does so as well, indicating the this sense of family was also important to Kershaun. Kody's own sense of family is exhibited when he insists on going home after being shot rather than allowing his friends to take him directly to the hospital. He tells his mother then that what he wanted was her concern. She seems unable to show that concern because she so fully disagrees with his life choices, but tells Kody once that she wants to know what happened to her beautiful son who has now turned into a thug. Though there seems to be an overriding desire to have this family connection, there are problems in the reality of the family life and that's likely at least part of what Kody sees in the gang life he chooses. It's also the reason he chooses to get away from that life and to make a family with his own children.

# Style

## Perspective

The book is written in first person from Kody's point of view. While it's an acceptable perspective and works well for this story, there are also points that seem to be purposefully omitted. That's not necessarily a problem, though some readers may be distracted by the method in which some information is offered. For example, Kody says merely that by a certain point in time, he and Tamu have had a second child. There is no real discussion of where their relationship stands, where he was when the child was born, or whether it was a planned pregnancy considering Kody's standing in the gang activity at that time. The fact that Kody's life is occurring through this book makes it easy to forget that the true story is about Kody's gang affiliation and his eventual ability to make changes in his life.

## Tone

The story is written in a straight-forward style that should prove easy to read for any reader with an adequate vocabulary. It should be noted that there are sections of foul language that some readers may find offensive. Early in the book, the dialogue consists largely of gang language, including words such as "nigga," and using words and phrases that may not be familiar to many readers. The dialogue, while apparently believable and seeming to reflect traditional gang language, may become a stumbling point for some.

There are few characters referred to throughout the book by their true, given names. Most have names like "Crazy De," "Fat Rat," and "Huck." Kody himself becomes known as "Monster" and his brother is called "Li'l Monster." There are few instances in which real names are used for those Kody associates with, meaning there is no need to match nicknames with names. Some readers may simply be put off by the fact that Kody identifies only a few by their real name.

Another point that may cause problems for some readers is the fact that the politics of the gangs are so complex. It seems incredible that Kody and his fellow gang members could keep track of which gangs they wanted to attack and which they were currently on friendly terms with. The complexity increases as a group begins to attempt a reorganization of the Crips. Readers should understand that it's not vital to understand and retain every detail of these relationships in order to understand and appreciate the book.

## Structure

The book is divided into eleven chapters with lengths ranging from around twenty pages to more than thirty. The chapters are roughly divided into time frames of Kody's life.

Most chapters end with a tease of what's to come, such as, "Not long after that I left County with a sentence of seven years in state prison. My life has never been the same." The following chapter outlines Kody's life in prison. The eleven chapters are numbered but are also named: Initiation, Boys to Men, The War, Ambush, Can't Stop Won't Stop, The Juvenile Tank, Muhammad Abdullah, Tamu, 48 Hours, Reconnected, and Nation Time. There is also a preface written by the author and an epilogue.

It should be noted that the book is attributed to Sanyika Shakur. Kody Scott legally changed his name after his release from prison in the 1980s. However, he was known as "Kody," "Moster" or "Monster Kody" throughout the majority of the book. For that reason, he is referred to as "Kody" throughout this guide.

## Quotes

"How I expected to get away with flashing on a photograph is beyond me! But, too, it points up my serious intent even then. For I was completely sold on becoming a gang member." Kody in sixth grade, Initiation, Page 4

"Upon further contemplation, I felt that they were too easy to kill. Why had they been out there? I tried every conceivable alibi within the realm of reason to justify my actions. There was none. I slept very little that night. I've never told anyone of these feelings before." - Kody after the murders of his gang initiation, Initiation, Page 13

"I had been to five funerals in the previous two years and had been steeled by seeing people whom I had laughed and joked with, played and eaten with, dead in a casket. Revenge was my every thought." Boys to Men, Page 52

"Certainly I had little respect for life when practically all my life I had seen people assaulted, maimed, and blown away at very young ages, and no one seemed to care. I recognized early that where I lived, we grew and died in dog years. Actually, some dogs outlived us." Can't Stop, Won't Stop, Page 102

"Removing them from a program designed for immature, unsophisticated youths and hurling them into a highly competitive, one hundred percent criminal population and setting - where the only adults are the very same police deputies responsible for their initial capture - is clearly a way to breed a criminal generation." Kody on the LA County Jail, Can't Stop, Won't Stop, Page 136

"And as with everything from a union to a tennis club, it's better to be in than out." Kody on the reason he joined a gang, Can't Stop, Won't Stop, Page 138

"If I just stopped gangbanging, perhaps I could avoid prison, an early death, and a few other occupational hazards. But to 'just stop' is like to 'just say no' to drugs, or to tell a homeless person to 'just get a house.' It 'just wasn't happening.'" The Juvenile Tank, Page 163

"Lines of race, of national unity that defied political logic and overstanding, were clearly drawn in Youth Authority, which served as a junior college for the larger university of prison." Muhammad Abdullah, Page 206



"As you kill each other, the real enemy is steadily killing you. Your generation has totally turned inward and is now self-destructive. You are less of a threat when you fight one another, you dig?" - Muhammad to Kody and his brother, Muhammad Abdullah, Page 219

"I felt awkward because applying for a job just wasn't the gangsterish thing to do. You either jacked for money or you sold dope. Working was considered weak." Tamu, Page 251

"What are they expecting? Some pig says, 'Okay, bend at the waist and give me five loud coughs,' and plink! a knife fall out of a man's ass? Although I know that prisoners do secrete weapons, drugs, and other things in their butts, the pigs haven't ever found anything on the searches I've been involved in. The process is just another ritual designed to degrade." Reconnected, Page 321

"I was marched through so many gates and doors that I felt like Maxwell Smart." Reconnected, Page 329

"After having spent thirteen years of my young life inside what had initially seemed like an extended family but had turned into a war machine, I was tired and disgusted with its insatiable appetite for destruction. Destruction no longer fed by narcissism. It was not an expression of my thoughts. I wanted to construct something, which in banging is tantamount to treason." Nation Time, Page 355



## Topics for Discussion

Describe Kody's initiation into the gang. What gang does he join? What set? Define "set."

What does Kody do as "work" for the gang? How strong is his devotion? Give an example of Kody's devotion to the gang. Kody says that a gang sometimes takes the place of a family. Is this what happens in his case? Why do you believe that or why not?

Who are the two girls in Kody's life? Describe his relationship with each. How are they different? The same? What attracts Kody to each of the two?

How does Kody get the name "Monster?" When Kody's brother, Kershaun, joins, what name is he given? What name does Kody adopt for himself later? How - and why - do the two differ?

Who is Keondra? What impact does she have on Kody's life?

Describe the politics of the Crips. What does Kody say about the Crips' worst enemy? Give an example of this. What kinds of actions are likely to prompt violence among the sets of a gang?

What is it that finally lands Kody in jail for several years? He's begun hearing about the "syndicate." What does he learn about that organization while in jail? What decision does he find he eventually must make? Why does Kody say most gang members can't break free of the gang? How does Kody manage the break?