

Monster Study Guide

Monster by Walter Dean Myers

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Overview

Monster is presented as a screenplay, with handwritten comments, by the main character Steve Harmon. Steve says that he is writing the screenplay to keep his sanity while being held in prison during his trial for murder. "I am so scared. My heart is beating like crazy and I am having breathing trouble," he writes. "The trouble I'm in keeps looking bigger and bigger. I'm overwhelmed by it. It's crushing me." In a story about a young man who gets in deep trouble by being greedy and wanting to look tough, the sheer terror of prison and the prospects for conviction are conveyed in blunt descriptions. Monster, one of the most horrifying novels ever written, is titanic in its sheer terror.

About the Author

Walter Dean Myers was born August 12, 1937, in Martinsburg, West Virginia. When he was two years old, his mother died, leaving his father to cope with eight children. Myers and two of his sisters were taken in by Herbert and Florence Dean, who, although poor, took good care of him.

In gratitude, he made Dean his middle name during the 1970s.

They lived in Harlem for most of his youth. He had a severe speech impediment that made his life difficult when he was required to speak. This may have made him somewhat shy and account for the solace he found in reading literature while still in elementary school. His love of books may also explain why he decided to be a writer.

After dropping out of high school, he bounced from job to job before joining the army. Upon leaving the army, he began writing in earnest for the *National Enquirer* and men's magazines.

He landed a job as an editor at BobbsMerrill Company in 1970 and held it until 1977. While at Bobbs-Merrill, Myers quickly learned about the publishing side of professional writing and learned how to put together a book that would satisfy a publisher's needs. At first, he created picture books for small children. Then he tried his hand at writing fiction, both for young adults and for elementary school-age youngsters. Since then he has been celebrated for his books about African Americans. His success in this area, however, has tended to pigeonhole him as a writer with limited ethnic appeal, even though his writings transcend race and speak to all readers.

His first marriage ended in divorce. He and his second wife, Connie, have three children and a growing number of grandchildren.



Plot Summary

Walter Dean Myers creates the story of sixteen-year-old Steve Harmon, from Steve's point of view, as he struggles with the fact that he is being tried for felony murder. It is a trial that, if the jury finds him guilty, could result in the death penalty at worst, and at best, over twenty years in prison. Steve is a young filmmaker, and as a result, Myers writes the novel in two forms. Most sections open with a narrative from Steve, as written in a notebook that he keeps in prison and in the courtroom, and then close in a screenplay format, where the characters' names are given in all-capital letters and camera directions accompany the dialog.

The general plot is simple. The reader first hears from Steve in a prologue narrative where he describes what it is like to be in jail as he waits for his trial to proceed. The plot moves ahead to the trial and fleshes out the story with flashbacks to scenes before Steve is arrested and shortly afterward. The psychological plot becomes more complex as Steve's emotions ride a looping rollercoaster immersed in fear and doubt. He hates and fears the jail environment, with its constant threat of violence and sexual violation. He doubts his own innocence and tries to convince himself that he is not guilty. He believes that his attorney thinks that he is guilty. He knows his mother still loves him, but his father distances himself from Steve because, Steve feels, his father no longer knows who his son is. Steve is not sure himself who he is. Is he a good person or a monster?

The story moves from jail to courtroom and back again. Sprinkled within the real-time plot, glimpses of Steve's neighborhood come in through the screenplay to reveal conversations that he has had with his co-defendant, how he was treated after being arrested, and attitudes in his Harlem neighborhood. Along with the testimony from witnesses, the events leading up to Steve's arrest become relatively clear. Two men enter a drugstore to rob it. The owner of the drugstore pulls a gun, and one of the men struggles with the owner. Someone shoots the owner to death with his own gun. The two men take cash and cigarettes, and then leave the crime scene to have a chicken dinner in a fast food restaurant.

Later, police investigate the crime. They take photos of the murdered storeowner and try to identify suspects, but because the detectives cannot lift any useable fingerprints, the case looks difficult. Along comes an informant, presently doing time in jail, with a story that eventually implicates Steve and his acquaintance, James King, in the murder. Another suspect, Richard "Bobo" Evans, testifies that he and King planned the robbery. Evans is serving time for selling drugs to an undercover officer; an event that happened after the murder and after Evans was implicated in the murder by yet another prisoner's story. Evans also testifies that King shot the victim and that Steve was part of the robbery team, acting as a lookout man. This testimony ties Steve to the murder and greatly damages his defence case.

Kathy O'Brien, Steve's attorney, openly tells Steve that his chances are slim to none unless he somehow distances himself from King and the robbery turned murder. Drama builds as Steve doubts his own innocence and writes some passages in his notebook



that could be incriminating. O'Brien warns him not to write anything in the notebook that he would not want the prosecuting attorney to see, but the reader sees what he has written. Is there anything wrong with walking into a drugstore and looking around for mints? Indeed, there is something wrong if the purpose was to check if the store was clear before the robbery. Had he done this on the day of the robbery? Was Evans truthful when he testified that Steve did walk out of the drugstore? Was the lack of a specific sign an indication that the coast was clear for the robbery? Had Steve walked a moral tightrope by not signalling anything? Could this have been a code worked out between Steve and King before the robbery, where no signal meant that the coast was clear, but some kind of actual signal meant that the robbery should be aborted?

The ambivalence of the situation becomes a clear threat to Steve's life, perhaps not with the death penalty, but definitely with a minimum of over twenty years in prison. He is about to lose his youth to prison, and possibly his life as he contemplates suicide. O'Brien decides that Steve must take the stand and demonstrate to the jury that he is innocent. She prepares him for this by coaching him on how to respond through a game where she asks questions and Steve answers them. If the answer is good, she turns a paper cup right side up. If not, she turns the cup upside down, and Steve has to try again until he gets the answer correct. This harkens back to a time when Steve stated that he was not guilty, and O'Brien responded that he should have said that he did not do the crime. Is this coaching intended to hide Steve's guilty feelings from the jury? Are the guilty feelings prompted from actual guilt or fear?

When it comes time for the defence to build their cases, Steve performs well while being questioned. He refers to the other robbery participants as acquaintances whom he hardly talked with at all. The conversations were all short and pointless, just polite acknowledgments or talk about ball games. Had he been in the drugstore on the day of the murder? No. What had he been doing on that day? He was mentally taking notes about filming the neighborhood. Was he nervous, and did he need to take a break? No. O'Brien's work with Steve seems to have worked.

King does not take the stand in his own defence. The evidence is stacked against him because he did participate in the robbery, and Evans has testified that he was the shooter in the murder. Will Briggs, his attorney, keep him out of jail with his closing statement? O'Brien does not think so. That happens only in the movies, and as has been emphasized earlier in the story, this is reality. This is the real deal, and it is not pretty. O'Brien has a better chance of moving the jury to Steve's side. His involvement with the robbery is doubtful, and therefore his guilt for the murder is also doubtful. The jury should not convict Steve on murder charges with this lingering doubt playing a role. The two defence lawyers give their closing arguments followed by the prosecution's closing argument. What will the jury decide? The plot has built drama to the expected climax where the reader finds out, "who done it."

What the reader actually finds out is who the jury thinks "done it." The jury finds King guilty and Steve innocent. But is he in reality? The law states that anybody involved in a murder is as guilty as the person doing the actual murder. The prosecution has argued that if Steve had entered the drugstore on that fateful day and given a passive signal



that the coast was clear for the robbery, he is as guilty as the killer. After all, what if he had not been the lookout? Would the robbery have been aborted in its early planning stage? What if he had signalled that the coast was not clear? Would not the robbery been stopped, leaving the victim to live? The argument was strong and the last thing that the jury heard before deliberating. Yet the jury found Steve innocent.

The ending of the story takes a twist that leaves the reader with the question of Steve's guilt or innocence unanswered. First, O'Brien turns away from Steve's outstretched arms after the not-guilty verdict is announced. She gathers her papers and leaves without acknowledging him, abandoning Steve to wallow in his own doubt about whether he is a good person or a monster. In the epilogue, Steve searches for the answer. Is his reaction coming from the stress of prison and the trial, or is he wrestling with feelings that he will never shake? Are these feelings of being a monster based on the truth that he did passively signal the all-clear to the robbers, and thereby he has blood on his hands? Is this what O'Brien saw in Steve when she turned away? If not, what did she see? Was O'Brien's behavior simply her keeping a proper professional distance from her client? Perhaps O'Brien is tired of working as a defence attorney. She did comment early in the story that she had been in court too many times.

The ambivalence of Steve's guilt or innocence is a plotting strategy meant to keep the reader's mind working on the themes of the story long after the reading is done. Myers wrote this story for a youthful audience, and his plotting of it masterfully speaks to young readers in highly personal ways that deliver maximum impact while using a minimum of words. The story is a relatively short work as novel lengths go, but as the simple language works, so does the tight structure of the plot line.



Prologue

Prologue Summary

The fictional author of this story, Steve Harmon, writes in a printing, non-cursive style about his impression of prison and why he is writing the story. Steve writes in a notebook that the prison authorities allow him to keep. He describes how his looks have changed, the terrible violence in prison, that he must live with fear every moment, and when he feels safe enough to cry. Steve ends the untitled prologue with a brief explanation of why he chose the title *Monster*.

Prologue Analysis

The untitled prologue is an introductory narrative by the fictional author, Steve Harmon. This piece builds tension and horror in its brief, violent descriptions of the prison experience and how it changes people. Every word and nuance demands to be read slowly and considered at length. The prologue acts as an introductory poem, giving the reader a sense of a hellish reality and Steve's method of coping with the environment. The hand-printed look of the text draws the reader closer to Steve's innermost feelings. He hates his environment, fears his environment, and desperately needs to get out of it. This part of the book was written at some time after the prosecutor begins her case, as the title derives from her reference to the killers as monsters.



Chapter 1, Monday, July 6th

Chapter 1, Monday, July 6th Summary

The first chapter begins with fonts and text styles that resemble a movie script, followed by text that resembles the opening credits and scrolling story introduction of the movie *Star Wars*. The opening scene is of Steve's prison cell, and the reader learns that he is sixteen-years-old. The scene moves from the cell to breakfast in the Manhattan Detention Center with other prisoners, to the interior of a Corrections Department van, and then to the courthouse.

After Steve meets his lawyer, Kathy O'Brien, they have a brief conversation in a small room used for this purpose before moving to the holding room, where Steve is handcuffed to a U-bolt mounted on the bench. A guard speaks briefly to him in a sarcastic manner. The scene then shifts to the courtroom itself. A typical first hearing ensues, and Steve takes notes of who said what. The notes are reproduced seemingly verbatim in this part of the chapter, with a significant representation of a particular thing done in the notebook. This appears as a watermark underneath the printed text, representing Steve writing "Monster" over and over, and O'Brien crossing out the words.

Toward the middle of the chapter, the scene shifts to a flashback of Steve in a high school film club meeting, where the club mentor explains a principle of film making, then the scene returns to the hearing. The prosecutor, Sandra Petrocelli, explains that even though the murder victim, fifty-five-year-old Alguinaldo Nesbitt, was shot with his own gun, this happened during a robbery of his drug store when the victim and robbers struggled after the victim pulled the gun in defence. The defence attorneys for the two defendants, Steve and James King, bring their arguments forward that the prosecution's evidence is not strong enough to bring a conviction, and the jury is remind to consider the defendants innocent until proven guilty. Two witnesses are called and questioned. The chapter ends with a flashback to when Steve was twelve-years-old and an incident he had with his friend, Tony.

Chapter 1, Monday, July 6th Analysis

The first chapter quickly establishes the main characters, the crime, the prosecution's case, the defence cases, and two glaring problems in the American justice system. Are trials just formalities before conviction to prison or death, and are the testimonies of convicts looking for a break ever trustworthy?

Steve is sixteen-years-old and in serious trouble. His lawyer, Kathy O'Brien, works hard to keep Steve's attitude positive, or at least neutral. As a typical sixteen-year-old, Steve uses a dark sense of humor in an attempt to lighten the situation by over dramatizing the screenplay's opening text. O'Brien tells him that the prosecuting attorney, Sandra Petrocelli, is good and that the prosecution will be going for the death penalty. How this



impacts Steve is unclear at this time, although he does ask if O'Brien thinks that they will win. She answers that it all depends on what is meant by "win." Could life imprisonment be a win over the death penalty? As Steve moves from the lawyer/client conference room to the holding room and is handcuffed to a bench, a guard comments that the trial is more or less a formality before locking defendants up. "Ain't that right, bright eyes," the guard quips (p. 14). Steve's only reaction is to look away from the guard, a common behavior for him when someone gives him grief.

Steve inserts a flashback scene into his screenplay just before the jury enters the courtroom. His film club mentor, George Sawicki, explains why predictable endings are not good form in films. He says that the audience acts as a jury and that they will prejudge a predictable film long before its ending. Is this a predictable trial? Was the guard right about this just being a formality before spending life in prison, or a period of time on death row before lethal injection? The brief flashback intensifies the reader's concern for Steve and reflects his own sense of doom.

The next scene is Petrocelli's opening statement for the prosecution outlines the murder case. James King, Steve's co-defendant who has another attorney, Asa Briggs, is accused of shooting and murdering the victim in his drug store during a robbery that King and another man, Richard "Bobo" Evans, attempted. Steve is accused of being the lookout man, the one who checked to see if the coast was clear before the robbery. This brief summary of the crime causes Steve to write the word "monster" over and over again in his notebook. O'Brien takes the pencil from Steve and crosses out all the words. The unstated message is for Steve to stop thinking of himself as a monster, but this is just the beginning of Steve's struggles with his self-image. The stated message from O'Brien is that Steve must believe in himself, an ironic platitude for a sixteen-year-old facing a harsh punishment for a crime he might, or might not have, committed.

O'Brien's opening statement for the defence reminds the jury that the law also protects those who are accused of crimes. She states that Steve's involvement in the murder is doubtful, and if the jury has not prejudged Steve, he will be found not guilty. Briggs emphasizes that the prosecution witnesses are not trustworthy, as they are admitted criminals. The opening statements encapsulate two different defence strategies. It is doubtful that Steve ever took part in the robbery, and thus he cannot be guilty of murder. With King, the prosecution witnesses are not to be trusted, but what about his involvement in the robbery? Did Briggs make a mistake that will hurt his client throughout the trial, or is King's involvement in the robbery unquestionable?

Jose Delgado, a young man who worked at the drug store, testifies as to what he found after returning from lunch and after the murder. The reader discovers a key part of the evidence against Evans and King, which consists of stolen cartons of cigarettes. Petrocelli tries to establish that the presence of Delgado in the store would have deterred the robbers turned murderers. She does not come right out with the conclusion, as this would bring an objection from the defence. Briggs, with little success, tries to trip Delgado up on details of his testimony. The stolen cigarettes remain part of the evidence. Nobody suspects Delgado as the killer, possibly due to not having a credible motive.



Sal Zinzi takes the stand next, and he ties the cigarettes to one of the robbers, but he does not know which one. This is a story that Zinzi heard from another prisoner. Briggs establishes that Zinzi is trying to get a break on his prison time to avoid rape. The hearsay nature of this testimony seems ludicrous. Why did the prosecution even consider this guy? That is a good question as O'Brien exposes the point that a convict's attempt to get a break by telling a story that incriminates a defendant yet to be convicted is commonplace. Can such stories ever be trustworthy?

Steve's next screenplay flashback tells a story when he, at twelve years of age, throws a rock that hits a young woman, and her boyfriend demands to know who threw the rock. Steve yells at Tony, his friend, to run, and the boyfriend punches Tony. Steve got his innocent friend into trouble with only one word, while Steve did not receive his just punishment. This parallels Zinzi's testimony, where the use of words can condemn other possibly innocent people, while giving the proven guilty criminals breaks on their just punishments.



Chapter 2, Tuesday, July 7th

Chapter 2, Tuesday, July 7th Summary

The second chapter begins with notes from Steve's notebook, set in the hand-printed type style. The message is simply that Steve hates jail. It is always threatening and often violent. Action then moves to the courtroom on the second day.

Wendell Bolden is being cross-examined, and he gives testimony that he knows who did the drugstore holdup. Both sides object over the questioning, stating that the questioning of the other side is out of line or over the bounds. Another brief flashback brings the reader to a conversation among four people: Steve, James King, Peaches, and Johnny. The conversation is about how hard it is to get money and what are the best targets for theft. After the flashback, the cross examination of Bolden continues, with Briggs losing his temper over Bolden's testimony. The judge calls for a recess. On the facing page of this text, a black-and-white photo shows a young black man in a prison cell.

The scene shifts to the Detention Center and a beating that is taking place. Two prisoners are beating a third in Steve's cell as Steve lies on his cot. Then the beaten prisoner is raped by one of the other prisoners while Steve closes his eyes. The chapter ends with a flashback to Steve and his little brother, Jerry, watching television together and engaging in brotherly talk.

Chapter 2, Tuesday, July 7th Analysis

Steve's opening notes express the depth of hatred he has for the jail environment. His screenplay serves the purpose of keeping him from going crazy, an interesting observation when one thinks about other authors and playwrights who have used their work to escape from ugly realities.

Wendell Bolden's testimony opens the courtroom scene. He says that he bought cigarettes from Bobo Evans, and King gives Bolden a dirty look. The scene then flashes back to King talking earlier in the neighborhood. This scene expresses that King is thinking about doing a holdup, but first he needs helpers. King asks Steve what he has, and Johnny asks how long Steve has been down. Johnny probably means that Steve isn't from an extremely poor family, so why is he hanging around? Steve says that he doesn't know what he has. What was Steve doing on the steps with these people? Was he curious or looking for something to film? The scene shifts back to Bolden's testimony.

Bolden claims that Bobo admitted to stealing the cigarettes. Petrocelli establishes that the cigarettes came from the same robbery that resulted in Mr. Nesbitt's murder. Briggs challenges Bolden's story and becomes angry, at which time the judge calls for an adjournment for the day. That both Petrocelli and Briggs object to each other's questioning shows the importance of this testimony, as it ties Bobo to the murder.



Briggs's frustration is understandable because Bolden's testimony will result in an assault charge against him being dropped. Did he make up the story, or had Bobo actually sold him the cigarettes? Perhaps the cigarette sale actually happened, but Bobo might not have talked about how he got merchandise. Briggs could have pursued these doubts about the testimony had the judge not stopped the proceedings, and this leaves the questions unanswered. Was this fair to the defence? The judge had some paperwork to do, and the screenplay shows one juror being bored. Is everyone, except the attorneys, unaware of how important this testimony is?

The scene then shifts to the Detention Center and the rape going on in Steve's cell. This is a horrible image offset by a flashback to Steve watching television with his little brother, Jerry. Jerry asks Steve if he wants to be a superhero, and Steve answers that he would like to be Superman. Jerry prefers that Steve be Batman so Jerry could be Robin. This pleasant flashback to brotherly love also expresses a fantasy wish for omnipotence in the face of the terrible violence and violation going on in Steve's cell. If only he were Superman, none of this would be happening.



Chapter 3, Wednesday, July 8th

Chapter 3, Wednesday, July 8th Summary

This chapter starts with another hand-printed entry into the notebook. Steve describes how he feels while in the courtroom and in the jail cell. Steve lets another inmate, Sunset, read the screenplay, and Sunset likes both the play and the title. A preacher comes to visit the inmates, and Steve describes an exchange that causes the guards to remove the preacher. Steve has a dream about being unheard and unseen in the courtroom.

The screenplay portion starts with small talk among the court officers, the judge, and Steve's attorney. The prosecuting attorney turns the conversation to business. The first witness is Detective Karyl, who investigated the crime scene. The screenplay scene changes to a flashback of Karyl investigating, then to a series of photos taken at the crime scene. More details of the investigation are revealed. Karyl did not find any useable fingerprints at the crime scene, and that his suspect list is based on hearsay evidence.

Another flashback screenplay scene shows Detectives Karyl and Williams interviewing Steve. The two detectives discuss the death penalty, speculating that Steve might get a lethal injection. The screenplay moves to a fantasy scene of Steve being prepared for lethal injection, then to reality where Steve and other inmates discuss the death penalty. The chapter ends with three scenes, one of Steve and his attorney discussing his chances for acquittal and another of Steve's neighborhood before the trial, which introduces the second witness for the day, Osvaldo Cruz. His testimony places Steve at the crime scene.

Chapter 3, Wednesday, July 8th Analysis

Steve observes in his opening notes that keeping the inmates from committing suicide could be part of the punishment. It must feel that way, especially after what happened the night before. He goes on to explain how he feels ignored during the courtroom proceedings, as if he does not exist at all. He is impotent to take his own life and treated like a cast-out member of society. A dream documented later in the notes emphasizes this feeling. What else could be taken from him?

Steve does not see the connection between Bolden's testimony and his case. He thinks that this is simply a parade of bad-looking people to impress the jury that he and King are the same. Although this might be true, the fact remains that Bolden's examination was cut short by a judge more interested in paperwork than Steve's fate.

Another inmate, Sunset, shows interest in Steve's screenplay. Steve lets Sunset read what he has written so far, and Sunset likes it. The good feelings that this gives Steve are challenged later on when a preacher visits, and another inmate tells those who want



to see the preacher that they are just criminals. Steve agrees with this idea to a degree, with the caveat that prison works to make prisoners feel like everyone else. Steve still thinks of himself as a good person. He realizes how important it is for O'Brien to make him look human in the eyes of the jury. Yet the monster self-image is still present, as if the word "monster" is a tattoo on his forehead.

The courtroom scene opens with mundane talk about termites. Has everyone forgotten the curtailed Bolden testimony? Does this mean that the jury will simply accept it? Neither Steve nor Briggs seems to care. The next witness to take the stand is Detective Karyl.

Karyl describes the crime scene, and Steve's screenplay dramatizes what is found. It is a gruesome sight, as shown by the crime scene photographs. Peticelli asks if any evidence was found at the scene, and Karyl testifies that there was not. He went with the stories of Zinzi and Bolden to identify suspects, something that is often used in murder cases. Somehow the stories led the detective to King. Steve's screenplay flashes back to him with Detective Karyl and Detective Williams, where he is being questioned about King's statement that Steve shot Mr. Nesbitt. Steve denies any knowledge of the crime. The detectives talk with each other about having the case solved and the death penalty. The screenplay shifts to Steve being prepared for lethal injection, but it is still unclear how the testimonies so far tie Bobo to King, and King to Steve.

Brigg's cross-examination focuses on the lack of hard evidence found at the crime scene. He implies that the detective did not look for evidence, going straight to the "stoolies." Karyl denies that procedures were not followed. The screenplay shifts to Steve talking with other prisoners. One prisoner says that someone has to do time, and the authorities will lock someone up. Another says that the decision is up to the jury, and Steve claims to be innocent and a good person. The two scenes work together and illustrate how important the jury is in the legal process. What the jury thinks is all that matters, whether or not a person is truly guilty or innocent.

The next scene shows O'Brien talking with Steve in the waiting room. She explains to him that the case is not going well so far, and that half of the jury thinks Steve is guilty simply because he is young, black, and on trial. Additionally, the prosecution has a natural advantage over the defence because the jury sees the prosecutor as a good person, while Steve looks like a monster to the jury. O'Brien's job is not to show the jury that the prosecutor is a bad person, only to demonstrate that she made a mistake. These are problems built into the system, and the only thing that can be done is work with the disadvantages.

Oswaldo Cruz is the next witness, the witness that the defence tried to disallow at the beginning of the trial. The next scene is of Steve and Cruz having a conversation, a response to O'Brien's question to Steve about what he knows of Cruz. Cruz is fourteen-years-old and acts tough. A very important part of the conversation ensues, where Cruz accuses Steve of having no heart, and that he will not show up when "the deal goes down" (p. 82). Is this in reference to the burglary? Cruz takes the stand.



Cruz's testimony explains how he was afraid of Bobo, reveals that Bobo is twenty-two-years-old, identifies King and Steve, and Cruz admits to participating in the robbery. Briggs continually objects to Petrocelli's leading the witness, and just as the testimony ties Steve to the crime, the judge calls for another recess until the next day. It seems that every time emotions run high in his courtroom, he calls for a recess. This can be looked at from the viewpoints that Briggs tends to ruffle feathers and Petrocelli tends to overstep her bounds because she knows that she holds the natural advantage. In addition, the judge stops examination too often before the important connections are established or argued. Perhaps it is a combination of all three, but in any case, the jury is left with the impression that Steve was part of the burglary.



Chapter 4, Thursday, July 9th

Chapter 4, Thursday, July 9th Summary

Steve opens with comments about what O'Brien said regarding how badly the trial is going so far for him and that the lawyers might not know what Cruz is like. He tells about another prisoner who killed a guard in a robbery and his defiant attitude that leads to crying. Steve wants to cry too, because he could be sentenced to over twenty years in prison. He then thinks about his mother and the photos of Mr. Nesbitt's body at the crime scene. Steve writes that he is not a bad person and goes on to give a few details about O'Brien's past. He then recounts conversations that the guards were having at the courthouse and his reaction to King entering the holding pen.

The final part of this narrative involves what Steve sees when he is brought into the courtroom. What looks like a junior high school class observes the trial. When Steve looks at the class, the students turn away from him. Steve's mug shots are taped to his notebook, and he can imagine the students in back of him looking at the threatening prisoner.

Screenplay scenes of the courtroom follow. Steve notices an attractive black female juror, but she looks away from him. He puts his head down on the table, and O'Brien admonishes him. The prosecution continues its examination of Cruz, who solidifies the participation of King and Steve in the robbery, and also that the government is giving him a deal for his testimony. Briggs cross-examines, trying to discredit Cruz's testimony. O'Brien catches Cruz in a false statement during her cross-examination and extracts details about his involvement in a gang. The ending scene is of Steve's father visiting, a particularly difficult time.

Chapter 4, Thursday, July 9th Analysis

This part of the story is rich with contrasts and ironies. The case has not been going well until O'Brien's further examination of Cruz reveals a genuine reason for the jury to doubt his truthfulness. The reader should notice how quickly the prosecution stops its examination once Cruz admits to testifying in return for a deal from the government. In addition, the tag team-like defence cross-examination causes one of the jurors to shake his head. At this point, the defence gains a strong advantage over the initial high ground of the prosecution.

Steve's positive traits come through in his opening narrative. He cares about people, as demonstrated by his empathy with Ace's crying. Ace appears to be in a hopeless situation, having killed a guard during his robbery. Steve pays attention to conversations around him and feels disturbed over the photos of Nesbitt's body. Steve is sensitive to King's false confidence and impotent tough-guy act, and the humor that Steve feels ring ironically as he explains how the terrible prison reality trumps tough-guy acts.



When in court, Steve puts his head down and cries. He seems extra sensitive to the junior high school class and how it must see him as the prisoner, a threatening person. This feeling is augmented when the attractive female juror stops smiling and looks away. As the trial events raise the chances for Steve, his feelings about himself must be improving, but the tearful scene with his father brings him back into self-doubt. Does his father think that Steve is guilty, or is his father simply reacting to the strain of the trial? Does Steve believe in himself, as O'Brien insists he must, or is his emotional turmoil simply normal reactions to fear and stress?



Chapter 5, Notes:

Chapter 5, Notes: Summary

Steve continues to react to his father's tearful visit. The sight of his father in tears disturbs him, and he writes an explanation of what he did and did not do on the day of the murder. Steve thinks his father sees him as a monster. He adds that O'Brien thinks the jury does not see any difference between him and the bad guys taking the stand and that his father thinks the same thing.

Two women from the neighborhood, talking in West Indian accents, open the screenplay. The women talk about the murder, one speculating that it was over drugs. The other woman brings up the fact that Mr. Nesbitt had immigrated from St. Kitts, an island in the West Indies. The women then discuss leaving Harlem for California. The scene changes to a newscast that announces the murder, with a neighborhood resident expressing how murder in the neighborhood is common. The next scene shows Steve's shocked reaction to the news.

Two weeks later, the television news in Steve's apartment announces that Bobo has been arrested for the murder. The scene shifts to a handcuffed Bobo on television, then to Steve lying in his bed, staring out but not seeing. The police come to the apartment and arrest Steve. Steve's mother reacts with confusion and panic.

Chapter 5, Notes: Analysis

Steve reacts strongly to his father's crying, feeling a mixture of shock and doubt. The danger of the situation sinks in as Steve realizes that the jury considers him the same as the other neighborhood thugs, and his father sees him as a monster as well. The two neighborhood women talking about the shooting reflect the general attitude that this sort of thing is commonplace. The newscast brings this idea through as well. The ending scene dramatizes the mother's panic and helplessness to protect her son while he is being arrested, and a pathetic feeling of loss as she realizes that she does not know where the police are taking her son. To the neighborhood, this is a common event. To the mother, this is the beginning of a nightmare.

Steve's reaction to the newscast might indicate that he was involved in the crime, or it might mean that he simply knew about the plans but did not participate. He lies on his bed, staring out but not seeing anything. Is he expecting to be arrested, or is he merely thinking about the robbery and killing in general? When he first sees the news about the murder, why is he shocked? Again, does this indicate participation or a simple knowledge of the robbery plans?

The final page of this chapter has an illustration of a young black man in a striped shirt sitting in a car. He appears sullen, perhaps sad over the murder, perhaps frightened. What is he thinking about? The photo works to emphasize the inscrutability of the

scene, and so the difficulty of determining exactly how deeply Steve was involved with the robbery turned murder.



Chapter 6, Friday, July 10th

Chapter 6, Friday, July 10th Summary

In the handwritten notes opening section of this chapter, O'Brien explains how the prosecutor is using the crime photos to sway the jury against the defendants. Steve thinks about writing a description of what happened in the drugstore, but he would rather forget it. He demonstrates empathy with the murder victim and describes a chore he did at the prison with other inmates. The mopping of the floor is uncomfortable, and it nearly makes Steve sick.

Steve wants to be away from this place, but he also realizes that he had tried to be tough like Bobo, Osvaldo, and King. The movie scene is of the City Clerk verifying that the murder victim's gun was registered and legally present in the drugstore, and of Detective Williams describing the crime scene and how the body was handled. Finally, the Medical Examiner explains in detail how Mr. Nesbitt died. He drowned in his own blood.

Chapter 6, Friday, July 10th Analysis

The prosecutor knows that Cruz's testimony helped the defence more than the prosecution, and to counteract this, she uses the crime scene photos to impress the jury with the horrible murder. O'Brien knows this, but she cannot do anything about it. Her anger comes from frustration. That Steve thinks about writing a description of what happened in the drugstore indicates that he has knowledge of this, which would also put him at the crime scene.

When Steve does his prison chore and nearly gets sick, he realizes a great irony of his situation. While in the neighborhood, he had wanted to be tough like the other guys. Now his case depends on convincing the jury that he is not like these other guys. Does this mean that Steve had been a lookout during the robbery in an attempt to be like Bobo, Osvaldo and King? Had he taken a small step toward proving himself worthy enough, tough enough, and with enough heart?

Allen Forbes, a City Clerk, takes the stand in the screenplay. His testimony establishes that Mr. Nesbitt kept the gun in the store legally. The next witness, Detective Williams, testifies about the handling of the crime scene and how Zinzi's story eventually led to Richard "Bobo" Evans's arrest. Dr. Moody testifies next, explaining how Mr. Nesbitt died. Steve expresses emotion with his sharp intake of breath. King remains sullen and tough. Is Steve's reaction genuine, or is he trying in some way to differentiate himself from King? The need to do this has been nagging his mind, and he might have a little awareness how just being in the drugstore on the day of the murder could land him in prison for a long time.



Chapter 7, Saturday, July 11th

Chapter 7, Saturday, July 11th Summary

In the opening notes, Steve writes about his attorney. He tries to make small conversation with her, but she balks at the overture, and then apologizes for cutting him off. Steve thinks that she believes him to be guilty. The attorney catches Steve on a statement of his about not being guilty, possibly because he expresses the idea in a way that a guilty person might.

Another inmate receives a guilty verdict and expresses his reaction to it. Steve grows fearful as he thinks about what punishment he might receive if the jury finds him guilty. He rolls what he did and did not do around in his mind, and it does not make sense to him that he is guilty. Another prisoner explains why he should be found innocent of an attempted robbery. Steve thinks that the man is trying to convince himself of his own innocence. Steve reflects on prison violence and how he might take his own life if he has to spend significant time in prison.

Steve's mother visits and brings him a bible. She wonders if she should have hired a black lawyer for him, but he denies that race has anything to do with the case. She has him read a verse from the bible. The notes end with Steve wondering if he did or did not do anything wrong. The movie scene is short, and it involves King and Steve talking about the robbery. Steve does not agree or disagree to act as lookout, and the scene ends with the question being repeated and growing in volume.

Chapter 7, Saturday, July 11th Analysis

This is a key chapter for the idea of whether Steve is guilty of the crime or not. O'Brien warns Steve not to write anything in his notebook that he does not want the prosecution to see, as if she had read his mind about his urge to write about what happened in the drugstore. Had she read his notes? Is this why she catches him in the subtle slip of expression that a guilty person might use? If she believes him to be guilty, is this why she acts coldly toward Steve and why she says that she has been in court too many times?

Sunset receives his guilty verdict for his robbery and murder. He tries to lessen the seriousness of his fate, but when Steve writes about doing long time for his crime, and considering the death penalty ideas presented earlier in the novel, the reader understands that Sunset is kidding himself. He will likely receive lethal injection for his crime. Steve tries to convince himself that walking into a drugstore to look for mints is not a crime, but it is if he did so as part of the robbery plan. The story about Sunset and his botched robbery exposes another prisoner trying to rationalize his way out of his responsibility. No robbery took place, so how can he be found guilty? This sequence demonstrates how people continually rationalize their behavior, trying either to lessen



the results of their crimes or to deny them altogether. This can also be looked upon as common human behavior outside the justice system. Rationalization is a part of human nature. The violence before lunch causes Steve to think about doing twenty years in prison and about using suicide to get out, the ultimate prison break.

When Steve's mother visits, he tries to be strong for her, and she speculates that maybe she should have gotten a black lawyer for him. Steve denies that race has anything to do with the trial. However, the reader knows that race has some impact, considering that at the beginning, half the jury thought Steve is guilty just because he is young, black, and accused of a crime. It appears that Steve is trying to be strong for his mother with this denial. She gives Steve a bible and asks him to read a passage about the Lord giving strength. She then tells him that she believes in his innocence, no matter what anyone says. Afterwards, this prompts Steve to lie on his cot and wonder about his own innocence. Steve has his doubts.

The brief movie scene of King telling Steve that the robbery plan is coming together serves to bring in the question of whether Steve agreed to be the lookout man or not. Does Steve have the heart, King asks. Steve does not answer. Will Steve be the lookout man? The question is dramatically repeated, but Steve does not answer, at least not in the screenplay. In reality, Steve's fate depends on his answer to this question.



Chapter 8, Sunday, July 12th

Chapter 8, Sunday, July 12th Summary

Steve goes to breakfast and is served extra large portions because most prisoners skip Sunday breakfast. He goes to a church service, where nine other prisoners are attending, and two of them get into a vicious fight. The guards are called and they act as if they do not care if the fight is going on. The prisoners are locked down and play cards, and another fight almost breaks out. Steve speculates about why people fight so much in prison.

After being let out of lockdown, Steve watches a baseball game and feels the difference in his prison world and the world from where he came. He looks down a corridor to the streets of New York, nearly empty on Sunday. He spots Jerry on the street with his parents and waves. The visit with his parents is upbeat, but Steve feels that his mother is already mourning his death. Steve ends his Sunday by going over his screenplay.

Chapter 8, Sunday, July 12th Analysis

The remarkable characteristic about this section is its brevity. The subsequent courtroom movie scene is separated from the notes portion by date, and this leads to reading the two pieces as separate from one another, as opposed to other chapters that keep the hand-written narrative close to the movie scenes. Melancholy is the mood as Steve's church service comes to an abrupt and violent end, he spends time in lockdown and more violence threatens to break out, his mother seems to be mourning his death. To heighten the sad feelings, an illustration is included at the end of his mother holding up a grainy and blurred photograph. Is that Steve or Jerry? The subject looks distorted, even monstrous.



Chapter 9, Monday, July 13th

Chapter 9, Monday, July 13th Summary

This chapter consists of a single movie scene, in which the prosecution brings forward its other witnesses. Lorelle Henry, a former librarian, testifies as to what she witnessed in the drugstore right before the murder. She recounts how a fight broke out and identifies King as being one of the two men. King's attorney cross-examines, attempting to discredit Henry's identification of King. O'Brien has no questions.

The next witness is Richard "Bobo" Evans, who shows up in a prison jumpsuit because he refuses to wear a suit. Bobo identifies himself, gives his age and verifies that he knows King but just met Steve. The prosecutor has Bobo list his past crimes, which are many. Then Bobo identifies Steve as the lookout man who gave the sign that the drugstore was clear. This leads to Bobo's description of the robbery/murder that he and King committed, after which the two went to get fast-food chicken. Bobo identifies King as the one who shot Mr. Nesbitt. King's attorney cross-examines, trying to discredit Bobo's testimony due to the plea bargain that Bobo has made and attempting to get him to admit to the murder himself, which does not work. O'Brien then cross-examines Bobo and tries to distance Steve from the robbery, with doubtful success. The prosecutor asks questions next, designed to connect Steve with the robbery money. This fails. The scene ends with the people resting, Steve's mother talking to his attorney, and a guard standing next to Steve. In the screenplay, Steve uses cartoon characters to indicate that the people have rested.

Chapter 9, Monday, July 13th Analysis

An important thing to notice in this courtroom scene is how Bobo handles himself on the stand. He has been on the stand many times before and knows how to express things in ways that take as much guilt off of him as possible. Unlike Steve's slip in the previous section, Bobo says that he did not do something, not that he is not guilty. He also catches Briggs' attempt to get him to slip and admit to the murder. The legal sparring that is shown here builds drama and makes King's case look weakened. The prosecution brings in a highly credible witness in Henry, but she only identifies King, not Steve. For Steve's case, the damage comes from Bobo's testimony that Steve had agreed to be the lookout, and that he gave the signal that everything was clear for the robbery. An illustration toward the end of the chapter shows Steve's face pixilated, as if done so by video technology to hide his identity, indicating that the jury knows him even less after the people rest. His sarcastic attitude is reflected in the cartoon sequence in his screenplay, but what has happened could have seriously damaged his defence.



Chapter 10, Tuesday, July 14th

Chapter 10, Tuesday, July 14th Summary

The opening notes involve Steve's attorney meeting with him the day before she is to present his defence case. Steve expresses his deep fear that he will be found guilty. The screenplay then documents the defence case being made. King's attorney presents King's case first. Briggs and Petrocelli question Dorothy Moore, King's cousin, about a lamp that King bought for her. George Nipping, who has known King for a long time, testifies about whether King is right or left handed.

In a brief interlude, Mr. Sawicki lectures in a film class. The film scene then switches to O'Brien and Steve in the room where lawyers meet with their clients. O'Brien coaches Steve on why he needs to take the stand and how to respond to questions. A night scene in jail ensues, with two illustrations of Steve and watermarks that read "What was I doing" and "What was I thinking," then come scenes of Steve getting ready for his testimony day in court. O'Brien examines him first, amounting to a brief statement that Steve did not do the crime. Petrocelli cross-examines and tries to tie Steve to King, Evans, Cruz, and the crime scene.

The defence calls George Sawicki to the stand, and he testifies on behalf of Steve's character. Then Briggs does the closing argument for King, and O'Brien does the closing argument for Steve. Within O'Brien's closing argument, two clear illustrations of Steve appear, one a far shot and the other a closeup of Steve's head. Petrocelli gives her closing argument, and the Judge gives directions to the jury. Steve is then returned to prison.

Chapter 10, Tuesday, July 14th Analysis

O'Brien explains to Steve that Bobo's testimony had indeed hurt his case, and also that Briggs wants to tie Steve to King because Steve seems like a decent guy. Steve experiences the symptoms of a panic attack, contrasting his intense fear with the calm scene on the street below. He realizes that the other prisoners kid themselves about having chances that do not exist, and he wonders if he is the same. "Maybe we are here because we lie to ourselves," he comments (p. 203). Is this true? Is Steve guilty of murder through being a lookout in the robbery plan, and does the jury think this way?

The screenplay begins with Dorothy Moore's testimony for King, where she claims that he was at her house during the murder. Mr. Nipping's testimony follows, and he testifies that King is left-handed, a weak attempt of Briggs's to disassociate King from the murder. The brief cut to Sawicki talking about keeping film simple makes an observation that ties to Briggs defence of King becoming too complex for the jury.

The next scene consists of O'Brien telling Steve that he has to take the stand in order to distance himself from King. S he also explains how King cannot take the stand and the



weakness of Moore's testimony. O'Brien emphasises to Steve just how important his testimony will be, because how well he convinces the jury of his innocence will decide how he spends the rest of his youth. She then does the cup exercise, training for Steve's performance on the stand. Will he have a chance?

Back in the prison cell, Steve overhears two prisoners talking about one of them lying on the stand and admitting it to the prosecuting attorney. On these two pages are photos of Steve in the drugstore, with the words, "What was I doing?" and "What was I thinking?" in handwriting (pp. 220-221). This must be Steve's greatest weakness. He was in the drugstore on the day of the murder, perhaps as a lookout for the robbery. He must not admit to this on the stand in any manner. As the other prisoners have expressed, truth is relative to one's survival. Steve must deny that he was in the drugstore the day of the murder, no matter if this is true or not. His freedom depends upon his performance.

During Steve's testimony, he answers O'Brien's questions with definite, straightforward answers. He does the same with Petrocelli's cross-examination, and the dramatic highpoint comes with this exchange:

PETROCELLI: "And are you saying that it was just a coincidence that you were coming out of the store at that time?"

STEVE: "I don't know exactly when the robbery happened, but I know I wasn't in the drugstore that day." (p. 229).

Is this the point where Steve lies in order to disassociate himself with King, Bobo, the robbery, and with the murder? Upon further questioning, Steve denies that he was in the drugstore the day of the murder a total of three times. Petrocelli keeps questioning Steve, trying to trip him in his testimony. She strongly suspects that he was in fact the lookout for the robbery, but O'Brien objects every time that Petrocelli tries to frame questions that imply conclusions. The prosecution is so certain that Steve is guilty that the questioning causes Briggs to object, and the judge agrees with Briggs that she should know better. Petrocelli is convinced of Steve's guilt, but is the jury? His nervous reaction after the questioning could be a normal stage fright response, or it could arise from Petrocelli nearly pegging him as part of the robbery turned murder.

Briggs's final argument to the jury consists primarily of discrediting the prosecution's witnesses, while appealing to the members' senses of who to trust. Should they trust admitted criminals or King's cousin, who never committed a crime? The trouble with Briggs' argument is that the jury has likely made up its mind at this point. Still, can any of the prosecution's witnesses be trusted, and if so, how far?

O'Brien has more to work with in her closing argument because Steve testified in his own defence. She uses this advantage to remind the jury that the prosecution has not shown that he agreed to participate in the robbery, although Bobo Evans said that Steve was to give a signal that the coast was clear. If he was the lookout man, why did he not see Miss Henry in the drugstore? Also, he gave no signal that the coast was clear,



according to Evans. O'Brien uses a more personal approach to make her argument against the credibility of the prosecution's witnesses by asking if the jury believes Bobo Evans. She follows this up with a personal story about how she decided that Steve is a victim, similar to Mr. Nesbitt, just a "getover" to Evans. O'Brien makes a very strong point that Miss Henry did not see Steve in the drugstore, only King.

Petrocelli's closing argument for the State begins with a series of statements about what the defence wants the jury to think, then focuses on the credible witnesses for the prosecution. Her arguments supporting King's participation in the robbery turned murder are convincing, but she makes a leap to include Steve and proceeds to tell the jury that everyone involved in the crimes are all equally guilty. She then attempts to define the moral decision that Steve had made when he agreed to be the lookout man. Steve might not have pulled the trigger, but he helped enable the robbery, and so he carries equal guilt for the murder. The judge's instructions to the jury also make this point.

The prosecution has difficulty placing Steve at the scene of the crime or to connect him with the robbery. None of the credible witnesses place him or identify him, so his chances of acquittal are better than King's. For King, Miss Henry's testimony might seal his fate with the jury.



Chapter 11, Friday Afternoon, July 17th

Chapter 11, Friday Afternoon, July 17th Summary

Steve's opening notes reflect his concern and how he feels about being accused of making a wrong moral decision. He imagines what he would say about this in his movie, and he also understands why inmates want to appeal their cases. In the courtroom scene, the verdicts are read for King and Steve. King is found guilty, and Steve is found not guilty.

Chapter 11, Friday Afternoon, July 17th Analysis

This is the climactic end of the novel. Steve uses Star Wars rolling text in his screenplay to dramatize the build to climax. After the jury announces its verdicts, the guards take King back to jail, and the guards behind Steve step away, indicating his not-guilty verdict. Steve opens his arms to hug O'Brien, but she does not respond. Steve ends his screenplay with an image of him with his arms outstretched, turning into something that looks like a monster. Has the not-guilty verdict failed to vindicate Steve in his own conscience?

Chapter 12, December 5 Months Later

Chapter 12, December 5 Months Later Summary

Steve writes about how he is filming himself from different angles as he attempts to explain who he is and what he is about. His mother does not understand, and his father continues to distance himself from Steve, due to not being sure who Steve is. Steve wonders what O'Brien saw in him that caused her to turn away from his open arms.

Chapter 12, December 5 Months Later Analysis

The last chapter of this story consists of a short epilogue about what happens after the trial. Steve seems to be branded for life as a monster capable of committing terrible crimes, regardless of his not-guilty verdict. His character and self-image have been tainted by the American legal system simply for his involvement in it over a relatively short time, or is Steve actually guilty of the crime with which he was charged? Had he been a part of the robbery that turned into a murder all along? Is Steve trying to convince himself that he is a good person? The novel ends with unanswered questions, a technique to cause the reader to think beyond the story and into the realities of life and the legal system.



Characters

Steve Harmon

Steve is the main character and protagonist of the novel. He is also the fictional author, and the entire book is written from his point of view. Steve moves from being a good person to a monster, then toward being a good person once again and back to thinking that he as a monster. He expresses conflict over his guilt or innocence in various ways, and in the end, the jury finds him not guilty. Did he participate in the robbery and therefore, according to the law, is he equally as guilty as the person who killed Nesbitt? Steve also describes the crushing prison environment in his narratives and screenplay. A major change in Steve's character happens in prison, where he realizes that trying to be a tough guy like King, Bobo and Cruz is a huge mistake. This might scare him straight for the rest of his life, and with his sincere hatred of the environment, this is more than likely.

Kathy O'Brien

O'Brien is Steve's lawyer. She serves as a friend of the protagonist, but she has doubts about him. She does manage to get Steve out of his dangerous position, but she also foils his transition from being a monster to a good person by turning away from him after the trial ends. Is this just the way things are in the real world of trial lawyers? Could the hugging after a not-guilty verdict be something found only in the movies, or does she realize that, according to the law, Steve is just as guilty as King?

James King

King is also accused of murder, but his guilt is clearer than Steve's. He thought of the idea to rob the drugstore and might have pulled the trigger during the murder, but being in the same courtroom as Steve hurts Steve's case. King is an unintended support for the antagonist. He also serves as a support to Steve because King is convicted, and as the story hints at strongly, someone had to be found guilty.

Sandra Petrocelli

Petrocelli is the prosecuting attorney. She represents the state and is therefore Steve's antagonist. She tries hard to convince the jury of his guilt but falls short of establishing his participation in the robbery. She does succeed in convicting King.



Asa Briggs

Briggs is King's attorney. As such, his cross-examination of prosecution witnesses serves to support Steve's case, but this is a side effect of his primary mission, which is to convince the jury of King's innocence.

Alguinaldo Nesbitt

Nesbitt is the murder victim, owner of the drugstore and a West Indies immigrant to the US. He is ironically murdered with his own gun that he legally kept in his drugstore for protection. King is convicted of this murder, but who really pulled the trigger? The prosecution does not have any hard evidence.

George Sawicki

Sawicki is Steve's film mentor. He likes Steve and testifies for his character. Sawicki is sure of Steve's innocence, and is one of the strongest of Steve's supporting characters during the trial.

Jose Delgado

Delgado is a prosecution witness who works at the drugstore but did not witness the murder. His testimony neither hurts nor helps Steve's case.

Sal Zinzi

Zinzi is a prosecution witness who is serving time at Riker's Island. Another inmate, Wendell Bolden, told him about the robbery turned murder, and Zinzi told a detective. Zinzi tries to shorten his prison time by testifying about what he heard from Bolden.

Wendell Bolden

Bolden is a prosecution witness. He ties Bobo to the murder, but he is also trying to reduce his time in jail for dealing drugs.

Jerry Harmon

Jerry Harmon is Steve's little brother. Jerry's brotherly love for Steve does not change throughout the novel, and this makes him a supporting character. Steve remembers a good time with Jerry while in prison and looks for him toward the end of the trial.



Detective Karyl

Karyl is a prosecution witness. He testifies as to why he picked Steve as a suspect. Karyl is in solid support of the antagonist.

Detective Williams

Williams interviews Steve with Karyl after Steve is arrested. Williams talks with Karyl about Steve's possible punishment for the crime of murder. He also gives testimony in support of the antagonist.

Oswaldo Cruz

Cruz is a fourteen-year-old prosecution witness. He testifies that Steve was the lookout for the robbery and that Steve was to get a portion of the take. However, he also states that he is testifying against the defendants to receive a deal from the government, and the defence catches him in a lie.

Judge

The judge is never named. He acts bored with the trial and declares recesses whenever the mood of the courtroom becomes tense. He does have an amount of integrity, as displayed when Briggs challenges Petrocelli's cross-examination of Steve, and the judge supports the objection.

Mr. Harmon

Mr. Harmon is Steve's father. His perception of Steve as his son changes dramatically with the trial. In the end, Mr. Harmon distances himself from Steve.

Mrs. Harmon

Mrs. Harmon is Steve's mother. She expresses panic responses when Steve is arrested but tries to support him emotionally while he is in jail. During the trial, she displays great concern about the fate of her son. Afterwards, she is puzzled with Steve's behavior.

Allen Forbes

Forbes is a City Clerk who testifies that the murder victim's gun was legally registered and that he had a license to keep the weapon in the drugstore.



Dr. James Moody

Moody is a medical examiner who testifies as to how the murder victim died. The description has an emotional impact on Steve, who sharply takes in a breath.

Lorelle Henry

Henry is a prosecution witness. She was in the drugstore when the robbery happened, but she did not see Steve. She does identify King as one of the robbers. That she saw King hurts his case tremendously. That she did not see Steve helps his case.

Richard "Bobo" Evans

Evans is a prosecution witness. He appears in court dressed in a prison uniform because he refuses to wear a suit. Briggs protests this to the judge, as the prison uniform will cause prejudice against King. The judge refuses the protest. Evans identifies King as the one who shot the murder victim and tries to bring Steve into the robbery as the lookout man. Bobo is also testifying to cut a deal with the government.

Dorothy Moore

Moore is King's cousin and a defence witness. She testifies that King was with her at the time of the robbery.

George Nipping

Nipping is a friend of King's and a defence witness. He testifies as to which orientation King has, right or left-handed. The testimony that King is left-handed does not help his case.



Objects/Places

Steve's Notebook

Steve's notebook is where he records the story at prison and during the trial. The notebook becomes an escape route for Steve's emotions and a metaphor of his life. For the period of the trial, the notebook is Steve. The reader hears his voice and sees his images through the notebook.

Crime Scene Photographs

The prosecution uses the crime scene photographs for maximum impact on the jury. Steve must look at them, and they work to make him frightened of conviction and painfully aware of how gruesome the killing was. The jury examines the photos twice.

Manhattan Detention Center

The Detention Center is where Steve is jailed and is Steve's greatest fear. He absolutely hates the place and could resort to suicide if he must spend many years there. The impact of his observations and experiences while behind bars and among the violent men run deep, possibly contributing to his odd behavior after the trial.

Courtroom

The courtroom is where the trial takes place and sharply contrasts with the prison. Civility and order characterize the courtroom, with only a few tense moments when the lawyers have objections. The judge quickly ends the proceedings when this happens. Nevertheless, Steve has deep feelings about how he is treated in the courtroom. He feels that he is unseen and unheard.

Prisoner/ Lawyer Interview Room

The interview room is a highly important place for allowing O'Brien to advise and coach Steve. She prepares him for the trial here, checks his emotional state, and runs him through an exercise on the best way to respond to questions from both herself and the prosecution. Without this room and O'Brien's help, Steve might have been convicted.

Drugstore

The drugstore is the scene of the crime. Mr. Nesbitt is the owner and the murder victim. Evans and King are the robbers, and King is convicted for shooting Mr. Nesbitt. At a



point in the story, Steve states in his notes that going to a drugstore for mints is not a crime, but did he do that on the day of the murder? Steve denies this when he testifies.

Harlem Neighborhood

The Harlem neighborhood is described in flashbacks to when Steve interacted with people there and when two Indian women talk about the murder. One of the women says that Harlem is not as bad as California. Additionally, Mr. Sawicki testifies that the neighborhood is Steve's subject for his film projects. It is a poor neighborhood with crime being a part of the environment, but it is not nearly as bad as jail and a step up from the courtroom.

Steve's Family Apartment

The apartment is Steve's center of family life. He has a pleasant memory of watching television with his little brother, Jerry. The flashback to when the police comes to arrest him takes place in the apartment, and the epilogue where Steve is filming himself also takes place here.

Setting

There are three important locales in *Monster*. The most frightening is prison. From the start, Steve wants nothing more than to escape from the prison. Inmates are beaten up nightly, and men are raped even in Steve's own cell. He does what he can to avoid looking vulnerable, certain that he would be beaten or raped if he did, but he is acutely aware that he is the youngest-looking inmate. He even avoids smiling at those who smile at him, afraid that even a smile would invite the worst. *Monster* does an incredible job of conveying the misery and horror of imprisonment. No one, not the guards, not the other inmates, cares one whit about Steve's safety. As for his fate, the guards have a betting pool on how long a sentence he will receive. Everyone seems convinced of his guilt except Steve himself.

Another setting is the courtroom, a world unto itself in which reality is distorted, even lost altogether. In it, the tough-talking gang member Osvaldo is a shy, soft-spoken witness. Having already admitted his part in the robbery and murder, he plays on his age (only fourteen) and contrives to seem like a little boy. James King, Steve's codefendant, appears to be handsome and dignified, even though he is a thug on the streets. The unreality of the courtroom contrasts not only with how people are perceived outside of it but also with Steve's prison. In the courtroom all is governed by procedure.

Everyone has a place to sit or stand, and rituals must be followed. In prison nothing is sacred. Inmates steal Steve's food, and there is nothing to be done about it. Men are raped; nothing is done to help the victims.

Beatings are almost random. And there is no privacy. Steve is afraid to use the toilet in front of other inmates. The courtroom is a marked contrast to prison, but it is in the courtroom that Steve's future is decided; whether he will remain behind bars, in the stark horror of prison, is decided in a place where nothing seems real.

The third major setting is revealed through testimony and Steve's comments on events.

He hung out with street toughs, trying to seem tough himself. He knew gangsters, muggers, robbers, and others who preyed on the weak and helpless. His part in the robbery and murder is something he is reluctant to admit to himself. He only went into the drugstore and out again. How can that be a crime, he wonders. Yet, his going into and out of the drugstore was plainly part of the crime of which he was a part.

Thugs attacked and shot to death the immigrant owner of a small store, a business built through long hours of hard work. The hard cruelty of the deed is brought out by the prosecution during the trial, in contrast to defense efforts to distort what happened and to lay the blame elsewhere.



Social Sensitivity

Although *Monster* focuses on moral issues that transcend social issues, it necessarily touches on significant social problems. Miss O'Brien's comment to Steve that being young and black may already make him seem guilty to the jury brings up a long-standing social issue, that of discrimination against African Americans in law enforcement. Social scientists have done surveys indicating that young black men form a disproportionately large group of prison inmates in the United States. Whether this disparity is due to racial prejudice, a higher number of crimes committed by blacks, or other factors such as poverty is not discussed in *Monster*. Miss O'Brien's remark is intended to emphasize the difficulty of persuading jurors to acquit Steve, not to explore the thorny issue of racism.

Steve's individual responsibility is more important than his race.

The prison system is another social issue raised by *Monster*. Steve is perpetually frightened in prison, and he has great reason to be. Men are beaten and raped nightly.

Guards are indifferent to the brutality and apparently ignore the savage assaults. Their appearance of indifference is disturbing.

After all, they are the authority figures in the prison. It is supposedly up to them to maintain order. Instead, prison is a hell in which the worst people are able to abuse the others.

Literary Qualities

That *Monster* is an unusual novel is obvious from the start. Myers builds the plot around a screenplay that Steve is writing during his trial for murder. Thus, most of the novel is told in dialogue, with characters' names in typewritten boldface followed by their remarks in regular type. Interspersed among the scenes of the screenplay are handwritten notes by Steve, in which he tells of his terror in prison and conveys his thoughts about events. Some handwriting is in boldface, indicating the main points he wishes to make. All this may be disquieting to some readers, but the experimental construction of *Monster* provides a way to look at Steve through his own eyes; since much of the novel emphasizes Steve's struggle with the moral aspects of his conduct, the screenplay format offers a good way to look at how Steve sees himself and at the question of whether he has become a monster.



Themes

Crime and Punishment

The primary theme of *Monster* reveals how the American legal system works to determine who committed a crime and how the criminal is punished. The book portrays the prison system through the eyes of a sixteen-year-old black teenager, who paints horrible images of life in jail, and this is just a detention center, not a penitentiary. Everyone who enters the system seems to be punished, guilty or not. Steve desperately wants to get out of prison, even if it means taking his own life. He also observes that the authorities take the prisoner's shoelaces and belt to keep the prisoner from committing suicide. Is prison really this bad? To Steve, it is the worst place in the world. However, he has yet to live a great deal of life. Compared to other prison situations that involve sanctioned torture and no due process, the Manhattan Detention Center is not so bad. Perhaps Steve's brush with the law this early in life will help him to take the straight path the rest of his life.

Guilt and Innocence

Is Steve Harmon guilty of the crime? Did he participate in the robbery, serving as a lookout man to check if the drugstore was clear? Sometimes Steve gives hints that he might have participated, such as when he writes on page 140, "What did I do? I walked into a drugstore to look for some mints, and then I walked out. I didn't kill Mr. Nesbitt." In Steve's mind, he might be forgiving himself, but in the law's view, if he participated in the robbery, he is as guilty as the person who shot and killed Mr. Nesbitt. This might be too harsh of a law, but it is the law.

Professionalism vs. Ethics

The prosecuting attorney does her job well, as does O'Brien for Steve's defence. Perhaps O'Brien is too good at her job for her own conscious. She keeps her distance from Steve and only comes closer for his time to take the stand. Then she pulls away again when Steve is acquitted. Has she defended too many guilty people successfully? After all, that is her job. The performance of King's attorney seems less committed to his acquittal, but that can also be interpreted as not having a great deal with which to work. King was involved with the robbery; of this there is no doubt. With Steve, being involved with the robbery also means being involved with the murder, and therefore guilty. Does Briggs assume that the sentence would be time in prison and not the death penalty? Is he certain that King will appeal, considering the witnesses and lack of hard evidence? What about the prosecuting attorney trying to trip up the defendants to admit their guilt in subtle manners? Is any of this ethical, or is it all just part of the profession?



Truth vs. Un-Truth

Most of the important witnesses against the defendants have something to gain by lying under oath. Does this mean that they are actually lying? The witnesses for the defendants also have something to gain, in that their relative and/or friend will not be taken from them. Does this mean that they are actually lying? How can anyone tell, other than through the witnesses' behaviors on the stand? Does Steve tell the truth about his own innocence? Why did O'Brien feel the need to coach Steve about his way of answering questions? Is Steve simply naive or is he really guilty? Perhaps directly to the point, should a person be too truthful in a trial that might put this person into prison for over twenty years, or is it ethical to avoid the prison time? After all, Steve did not kill anybody. He barely participated in the robbery, if at all. He might have been a foolish young man, trying to be tough like King, but is the punishment too harsh? After twenty years in jail, Steve would likely be a hardened criminal, if he does not kill himself first. What is the ethical thing to do in Steve's situation, tell the absolute truth or tell a lie to get out of trouble? Perhaps he was not in the drugstore the day of the murder, but Steve suggests that he was.

Social Attitudes

Steve seems to be considered guilty until proven innocent. His lawyer tells him that he needs to distance himself from King, or else the jury will consider Steve to be as bad. O'Brien also tells Steve that half the jury is convinced of his guilt even before the trial begins. The prejudice gets through the jury selection process. The guards taunt him and speak as if he were already convicted. Even his father has doubts about who Steve really is. If Steve's behavior is supposed to indicate his guilt or innocence, how does the horror of imprisonment impact his behavior? Steve wants to shout out to the court that he is not a monster, but he knows that giving into this feeling would only make matters worse. Meanwhile, King acts sullen and tough throughout the trial. This might work as a kind of self-defence in jail, but against him in court.

Family Love

Steve's mother tries to stay loyal to her son, but at times this becomes nearly impossible. She gives him a bible and suggests a verse for him to read. Steve takes this as her losing faith in his innocence and character. Steve's father distances himself from his son. The younger brother, Jerry, is the only family member who does not change his attitude toward Steve, and this might be due to Jerry's youth. The American legal system affects the defendant and the defendant's family in negative ways, stretching normal relationships thin and promoting doubt.



Uncertainty

Are we actually whom we believe ourselves to be? Steve has a big problem with this during the trial and for months afterwards. His attorney seems to think that Steve is actually guilty as she defends him. At the end, when O'Brien turns away from Steve's outstretched arms, his image changes into a monster. The more positive image of himself that he built during and after his own testimony melts away to reveal his true identity. Is Steve guilty or innocent? The reader does not know for sure, and perhaps Steve cannot face the possibility that under the law, he is technically guilty of murder. That is what the law says. Steve did not kill anyone with his own hand. At what point does responsibility begin and end? Could Mr. Nesbitt be responsible for his own murder by keeping a gun in the drugstore? Could he be responsible because he struggled with the robbers? Could Miss Henry be responsible for not raising a fuss or calling 911? Just because a law is written does not make it a just kind of law.



Themes/Characters

"You're young, you're Black, and you're on trial. What else do they need to know?"

Miss O'Brien, Steve's lawyer, tells him. She makes it clear that Steve's case will be hard to win, if for no other reason than the common belief that young black males are likely to be guilty of violent crimes. Early on in *Monster*, Steve suspects that Miss O'Brien thinks the case will be tough to win not only because he is a young black male but because she believes he is guilty of the crime with which he has been charged.

Even so, she is smart and cagey and does her best to separate Steve from James King and the other parties involved in the murder. She wants the jury to think that the others were merely passing acquaintances of Steve. She succeeds, but after the acquittal is announced, "STEVE turns toward O'BRIEN as camera closes in and film grows grainier. STEVE spreads his arms to hug O'BRIEN, but she stiffens and turns to pick up her papers from the table before them."

Does she see a monster when she looks at Steve?

This troubles Steve. He spends much of the novel wondering whether he is the monster the prosecution would have the jury believe him to be. He insists in his notes on his screenplay that he is not guilty— that what he did was too trivial to amount to being a participant in a robbery and murder. Yet, he has enough common sense to doubt his rationalizations: "It was me who lay on the cot wondering if I was fooling myself." This problem is the crux of the novel, because even though the plot is organized around the trial, the moral issues raised by Steve's actions give meaning to the events that transpire.

Steve tells us much more about himself than he means to, lending irony to much of what he has to say. His terror makes him a sympathetic figure: "I am so scared. My heart is beating like crazy and I am having breathing trouble. The trouble I'm in . . . [is] crushing me." On the other hand, he is a liar who perjures himself in court by denying that he was anywhere near the store the day of the murder, even though he has admitted to being there in his notes. Further, his actions have hurt many people besides the murder victim. For instance, when his mother visits him in prison, Steve observes, "In a way I think she was mourning me as if I were dead." She is deeply anguished throughout *Monster*.

Even after being acquitted, Steve discovers that there is still a price to be paid for his conduct. For example, "My [Steve's] father is no longer sure of who I am. He doesn't understand me even knowing people like King or Bobo or Osvaldo. He wonders what else he doesn't know." His image in others' eyes seems markedly changed. Further, his image of himself has changed: his image, he thinks, "looks like one of the pictures they use for psychological testing, or some strange beast, a monster." He wonders, "When Miss O'Brien looked at me, after we had won the case, what did she see that caused

her to turn away?" For all his rationalizations and excuses, Steve finds it hard to look at himself and suspects that he may really be a monster.

Style

Points of View

The entire novel is written from Steve's point of view. He attempts to bring in other people's points of view by changing the camera position in the screenplay, but this is still what Steve imagines what the other points of view might be. During his note taking at the trial, the reader is also seeing only Steve's interpretations of who said what and how. He might miss certain things, or he could be writing down the dialog inaccurately. Myers is careful to keep Steve's interpretations of reality from becoming obviously twisted, but he does offer clues on Steve's changing states of mind, such as when the screenplay camera focuses on individual jury members.

Steve tries to understand how others interpret their realities. He thinks that prisoners lie to themselves, and he speculates if this is the reason why people end up in jail. He empathizes with Mr. Nesbitt, wondering if his death was painful and what Mr. Nesbitt thought in his final moments. When his father cries, Steve's reactions run deep into his core, and he sees himself as his father must.

Other points of view that Steve interprets include those of the guards at prison and in the courthouse. The guards make light of his predicament, as if needling the prisoners is a part of the guards' daily duties. Could this be reality, or is it Steve's perception colored by his emotional turmoil? Mr. Sawicki testifies that Steve is an honest person because he creates honest films, yet how honest is Steve with himself? The fact that Steve questions himself about his honesty with himself indicates that he is at least courageous enough to look at reality as objectively as possible, and this might be the highest level of honesty that anyone can achieve.

Setting

The jail and the courtroom make up the two primary settings of this story. The settings contrast sharply, with jail being a living hell and the courtroom being a tightly controlled, and thereby stifling, place. Steve must move back and forth during trial days, and this has enormous impact on his emotional state. He cries at night when a beating happens and someone cries out, not because the beating has sparked the emotional expression, but because the noise covers his sound. He weeps into his arms on the courtroom table, and O'Brien sternly commands him to stop. In a way, Steve has more freedom in the jail than in the courtroom, although freedom might not be the right word. He has more camouflage. Other settings are handled through flashbacks, as when Steve's screenplay shows his Harlem neighborhood or his family's apartment. These flashbacks serve to flesh out Steve's story, to reveal relevant information, and to dramatize key events.



Language and Meaning

Myers handles the language of the courtroom and criminals well. The attorneys help to translate street slang into standard English for the jury, which also helps the reader. The most impressive use of language is how Meyers tells this story with very few words.

"Get over" is one of the more powerful terms used. Bobo considers the robbery to be a get over, and Briggs uses this disturbing term to discredit Bobo's testimony. Is murder simply something to get over, like a mild illness? But what Bobo means is that the robbery of a drugstore is a getover, where the police ignore it. The murder changes the get over into something very serious. When two women in the neighborhood have a conversation about the murder, one comments that California is worse than Harlem. The other answers that the weather in California is nice. In this simple exchange, Myers artfully shows how commonplace murder is, and it is about as important as the weather.

This story is full of big meanings behind a few words. It requires close attention to catch them all, but the emotional impact is usually obvious. Myers captures the language of the street, prison and courtroom masterfully.

Structure

Myers structures the novel in a similar way as a story told in a journal and also through a screenplay. The parts that are representations of Steve's actual notebook make up the journal. The screenplay adds drama and images while moving the action forward. Illustrations placed strategically throughout the novel add impact and flag important changes in Steve. These techniques save explanatory passages by creating mood with Steve's handwriting and providing images to study. The book gives credit for the illustrations to Christopher Myers, the author's youngest child.



Quotes

"Ain't no use putting the blanket over your head, man. You can't cut this out; this is reality. This is the real deal." Chapter 1, p. 7

"I can hardly think about the movie, I hate this place so much. But if I didn't think of the movie I would go crazy. All they talk about in here is hurting people." Chapter 2, p. 45

"The dream took place in the courtroom. I was trying to ask questions and nobody could hear me. I was shouting and shouting but everyone went about their business as if I wasn't there. I hope I didn't shout out in my sleep. That would look weak to everybody. It's not good to be weak in here." Chapter 3, pp. 63-64

"King curled his lip and narrowed his eyes. What was he going to do, scare me? All of a sudden he looked funny ... They do things to you in jail. You can't scare somebody with a look in here." Chapter 4, pp. 96-97

"I've never seen my father cry before. He wasn't crying like I thought a man would cry. Everything was just pouring out of him and I hated to see his face. What did I do? What did I do Anybody can walk into a drugstore and look around. Is that what I'm on trial for? I didn't do nothing!" Chapter 5, p. 115

"'I'm not guilty,' I said to her. 'You should have said, 'I didn't do it,' she said. 'I didn't do it,' I said." Chapter 7, p. 138

"Sunset said he committed the crime. Isn't that what being guilty is all about? You actually do something? You pick up a gun and you aim it across a small space and pull a trigger? You grab the purse and run screaming down the street? Maybe, even, you buy some baseball cards that you know were stolen?" Chapter 7, p. 140

"Her eyes were smiling but her voice cracked. In a way I think she was mourning me as if I were dead." Chapter 9, pp. 157-158

BOBO: "I wouldn't bring anybody into a serious jam unless they wanted to be there. You can't rely on nobody that don't want to be there." Chapter 9, p. 193

O'BRIEN: " ... I think you have to testify. And the way you spend the rest of your youth might well depend on how much the jury believes in you." Chapter 10, p. 216

BRIGGS: " ... Ladies and gentlemen, at the beginning of this case the prosecutor spoke of monsters. She not only found them, but she has brought them here to testify for the State. I have faith in you, and faith in the American judicial system. And that faith leads me to believe that justice in this case demands more proof than you have seen ... "

Chapter 10, p. 243



GUARD: "Hey, we got a pool going. I bet you guys get life without the possibility of parole. The guys on the next block think you're going to get twenty-five to life. You guys want in on it?" Chapter 10, pp. 265-266

"I keep editing the movies, making the scenes right. Sharpening the dialog. 'A getover? I don't do getovers,' I say in the movie in my mind, my chin tilted slightly upward. 'I know what right is, what truth is. I don't do tightropes, moral or otherwise.' I put strings in the background. Cellos. Violas." Chapter 11, p. 271

Adaptations

Myers's writings are usually categorized as directed at young African American male readers—an overly narrow assessment of their appeal. *Monster* deals with universal issues; members of any ethnic group can value what Myers has to say about the human condition. In *Scorpions* (please see separate entry), the protagonists Jamal and Tito are of two different ethnic groups, African American and Puerto Rican. In that novel a gun and a shooting figure prominently, as they do in *Monster*, and challenging moral issues form the interest of much of the novel. Like Steve, Jamal and Tito make some bad choices about criminal acts.



Topics for Discussion

1. Is Steve Harmon a monster? 2. Even though he went into the drugstore, looked around, and went out as he was expected to by Bobo and James King, Steve thinks that he is not really guilty of a crime. Why does he think this? What does this tell us about his personality?
3. At the end of *Monster* Steve says that "My father is no longer sure of who I am." Why would Steve's father be unsure? How sure is Steve himself of who he is?
4. What might have happened to Steve if the prosecution had seen his screenplay and notes?
5. After Steve's acquittal, his lawyer, Miss O'Brien, turns away from his hug. He asks himself, "What did she see that caused her to turn away?" What did she see? Why would she not be happy to have won a difficult case?
6. The text of *Monster* is unusual, with handwriting, screenplay dialogue, and scattered boldface. How do these elements affect your impression of the novel? Do they enhance your experience of the novel's events, or not?
7. During one of his mother's visits to Steve in prison, it seems to him that "she was mourning me as if I were dead." Why would he think this? Why would his mother be mourning him?
8. Steve's film teacher characterizes him as a very sensitive young man. How sensitive is Steve? Is he as sensitive about the man who was murdered as he is about himself?
9. Steve's teacher says he is an upright young man, yet Steve tells us that he hangs out with criminals, and he even challenges Osvaldo to a fight. How do you account for the two different perceptions of Steve—the creative, honest screenwriter and the violent, tough-talking participant in a robbery?
10. Would you have voted to find James King innocent or guilty? Would you have voted to find Steve innocent or guilty?
11. Will Steve avoid criminals in the future, or will he get into trouble again?
12. Is Steve's action—checking out the drugstore before the robbery—criminal enough to make him guilty of accessory to murder?
13. Why would Miss O'Brien put up such a good defense if she thought her client was guilty? What are the ethical questions she must consider?
14. Is it immoral for a lawyer to defend a guilty client?



Monster 269 15. Miss O'Brien says that closing arguments do not win cases. In what part of the trial does she win Steve's case?

16. How honest with himself is Steve? 17. What was your response when you read the sentence: "He has been found not guilty"?

18. Should Miss O'Brien be ashamed of herself?



Essay Topics

Myers has written this book for teenagers and young adults. Do the use of a handwriting font and the screenplay format help make this novel more accessible to the target audience than a traditional format might have? Why does Steve write in a printing style and not a script style? Does this say anything about his personality?

The novel does not answer the question of Steve's guilt or innocence for the crime he allegedly committed. Do you personally think that Steve is guilty or innocent? Why?

Steve uses his screenplay as an escape from the harsh realities of prison. At the end of the novel, he uses his film making skills as something else. What is Steve trying to do after his trial? Will this help his parents to better understand him? Will his father stop distancing himself from Steve?

Is Steve's attorney ever convinced of Steve's innocence? What did she see in Steve at the end of his trial that causes her to turn away?

Steve tells his mother that race has nothing to do with his situation. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Describe how Steve's self-image changes from the moment he is arrested to the moment that he is found not-guilty. How do the illustrations in the novel work to tell this part of the story?

In the American legal system, criminals are punished for their crimes. The innocent are set free. Does experiencing the American legal system have impacts beyond stated punishments? What are they? Are people who are found innocent unintentionally punished? How? What can be done to make the system work better, or is the system as good as it can get?

King acts sullen and tough during his trial. Did this work against him? Did his lawyer do the best job possible in defending him? Did O'Brien do a better job for Steve? Should King appeal his verdict?

O'Brien coaches Steve before he takes the stand. Is this an ethical thing to do? Why or why not?

Discuss the American prison system. How has it developed? What is currently being done with the system? Is it improving or degenerating? What impact does prison have on people now, and what impact should it have? Are the impressions of prison that Steve writes about accurate, exaggerated, or understated?

The reader learns that one can be guilty of a crime even if the person did not commit the crime, in this case murder. Is this law too harsh, too lenient, or just right? Why?

What message to teenagers and young adults is Myers trying to put across in this novel?



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. How many American shop owners are robbed each year? How many are killed?

Are the robbery and murder in *Monster* typical?

2. How common are beatings by inmates of other inmates in prisons? How common are rapes? Are the accounts of beatings and rapes in *Monster* accurate?

3. In your state, under what circumstances may a juvenile such as Osvaldo be tried as an adult? How often are juveniles tried as adults? How are they treated?

4. What are the ethical guidelines of your state's bar for lawyers defending guilty clients? How would they apply to *Monster*?

5. Objections are raised several times during the trial in *Monster*. What are the rules for making objections during a trial? When is an objection valid? When is it invalid?

6. What moral issues are raised in *Monster*? How well are they handled?

7. Who speaks for Alguinaldo Nesbitt in *Monster*? Some states have laws that allow representatives of murder victims to participate in trials. What forms do these laws take? How are the representatives of the victims allowed to take part in trials? Would any of the laws you discover have helped in the trial of Steve Harmon and James King?

8. *Monster* has many true-versus-false images. Identify them and explain how they affect the plot and affect Steve.

Further Study

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Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Editor

Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Cover Design

Amanda Mott

Cover Art is "Pierrot," 1947, by William Baziotès Oil on Canvas, 42 1/8 x 36 Donated by the Alisa Mellon Bruce Fund, ©, 1996 Reproduced with Permission from the Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Includes bibliographical references and index

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for the works of authors of popular fiction. Includes biography data, publishing history, and resources for the author of each analyzed work.

ISBN 0-933833-41-5 (Volumes 1-3, Biography Series)

ISBN 0-933833-42-3 (Volumes 1-8, Analyses Series)

ISBN 0-933833-38-5 (Entire set, 11 volumes)

1. Popular literature—Bio-bibliography. 2. Fiction—19th century—Bio-bibliography. 3. Fiction—20th century—Bio-bibliography. I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952-

Z6514.P7B43 1996[PN56.P55]809.3—dc20 96-20771 CIP

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Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1996