The Moves Make the Man Study Guide

The Moves Make the Man by Bruce Brooks

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

This novel for young people tells the story of an unlikely friendship between a young black man and a young white man in the racist southern United States of the early 1970's. As Jerome and Bix build their relationship, they each encounter difficulties at home that, in Jerome's case, strengthen his resolve to live a rich independent life, and in Bix's case lead him to discover some painful truths. In addition to issues associated with racism, the narrative also explores themes tied to the relationship between honesty and lies, and between perception and reality.

The story, narrated by Jerome, begins with his description of his determination to write down Bix's story, and of the lengths he went to in order to be true to Bix's memory following his disappearance. Jerome also describes, in some detail, the occasion when he first saw Bix - at a baseball game in which Bix played for a whites only team, during which he played amazingly well and he was visited by his mother, who behaved strangely.

The story proper begins with "Second Part," in which African-American Jerome is told he is to attend a whites only school as part of a government-mandated effort to end racial segregation. Jerome describes how, when he arrives, he has a couple of race-defined confrontations, but for the most part has a positive experience - until, that is, he tries out for the school basketball team, and in spite of his flashy, skilled playing, is bounced out of the tryouts by a racist coach. Shortly afterwards, Jerome's beloved mother suffers an injury that puts her in the hospital and out of the lives of her family, forcing Jerome and his two brothers to fend for themselves. Meanwhile, Jerome is given the opportunity to join a home economics class, which he takes because he is told it will help him learn to cook, and in his mother's absence, he has been left in charge of cooking the evening meal and not doing too good a job at it. When he joins the class, Jerome learns that there is another boy in the class, but he is away that particular day. At the next class, however, that boy is present, and turns out to be the baseball player Jerome had previously admired. Their first assignment is to bake a mock apple pie, which is judged to be both the most attractively put together and the most flavorful. When Bix learns of the pie's success, however, he reacts angrily, saying that his and Jerome's success has come as the result of a lie, and he never lies.

Bix's outburst causes him to leave the class, but Jerome eventually reconnects with him on a local basketball court where, after an initial conflict, Jerome teaches him how to play basketball. Bix is a fast and good learner, but reluctant to incorporate what Jerome calls "moves," or faked movements/gestures designed to draw an opponent off-guard. Calling them lies and protesting that he doesn't ever tell lies, Bix storms off the court, ending their tutorials. The boys don't see each other for a while, but eventually reconnect when Bix searches Jerome out and asks him to referee a one-on-one basketball game between him and his father. The game, Bix explains, is the result of a confrontation over whether Bix should be allowed to see his mother, who is now in an insane asylum. Bix is determined not only to win, but to win without using "moves" (i.e. lies). When the game actually takes place, however, both Bix and Jerome are surprised

to see how accomplished a player the stepfather is, incorporating fakes and "moves" that, at first, put Bix's victory in jeopardy. But after an on-court confrontation, in which the stepfather reveals how Bix's determined honesty triggered a breakdown in his mother, Bix resolves to prove his stepfather wrong, to see his mother and prove she loves him. He resorts to "moves" that fake his stepfather out, and win him the game.

Jerome accompanies Bix on his visit to his mother, who turns out to be so mentally ill that she initially does not recognize her son. As Bix is leaving the hospital, his mother suddenly realizes who he is and screams for him, but it's too late - Bix is gone. Jerome describes in narration how he and the stepfather traced Bix to a bus bound for Washington DC but got no further, and how Jerome got a postcard with no message from Washington that he believes to have come from Bix. The narrative concludes with Jerome's commentary that "moves" (i.e. lies) always have consequences, for both the person told the lie and the person telling it.

First Part, Sections 1, 2 and 3

First Part, Sections 1, 2 and 3 Summary

This novel for young people tells the story of an unlikely friendship between a young black man and a young white man in the racist southern United States of the early 1970's. As Jerome and Bix build their relationship, they each encounter difficulties at home that, in Jerome's case, strengthen his resolve to live a rich independent life, and in Bix's case lead him to discover some painful truths. In addition to issues associated with racism, the narrative also explores themes tied to the relationship between honesty and lies, and between perception and reality.

1 - First person narrator Jerome Foxworthy introduces the story of Bix Rivers with references to Bix's disappearance and to how there is no one else to tell his story. Bix's mother, he says, is in an insane asylum, and Bix's step-father is too busy gathering the pity and sympathy of the town, because Bix has run away, to tell the truth. Jerome then talks about his anger at how Bix is being spoken of in church (as a child "full of sin"), and about his impulse to stand up at the church and tell the truth (see "Quotes," p. 4). Finally, he writes about how he's got nothing but time, this particular summer, to tell the truth about Bix (thirteen years old, a "supreme" shortstop, given to flushes of color when angry and ashamed) and why he ran away.

2 - Jerome comments that aside from being a writer (see "Quotes," p. 6), there is another reason why he is the right person to write down the truth about Bix - he has Bix's notebook. He describes the notebook's contents, which contain directions that Bix used to take care of his baseball glove and also commentary on how to be a good shortstop, including the repeated phrase "spin light." Jerome describes how he sneaked into Bix's bedroom and found the notebook. He then suddenly weeps (see "Quotes," p. 9), and returns home, worrying that some people might think he's a thief but convincing himself he had done the right thing by rescuing the notebook before Bix's stepfather could burn it.

3 - Jerome comments that he first met Bix about a year before, just as school let out and baseball took everyone's attention away from basketball (Jerome's preferred sport). He describes the differences between the popular, well supported white little league and the less popular, poorly supported black little league, but says that he first saw Bix at a baseball game that he didn't necessarily want to watch, particularly when it came to watching some "flashy white dude." But Bix, he says, got him.

First Part, Sections 1, 2 and 3 Analysis

The first few sections of Part 1 serve as exposition, or an introduction of the circumstances in which the story of Bix Rivers and his relationship with Jerome is being told. As such, they contain several important elements of foreshadowing. Among the

most important is the reference to Bix's mother being in an insane asylum, which foreshadows both the appearance of his mother in Section 5 and later developments in the narrative, in which Bix's mother and the asylum both play a fundamental role (see "Last Part, Section 27"). Other important elements of foreshadowing include the reference to Bix's caring for his glove (again, see "Last Part, Section 27"), and the reference to the "spin light" (see "Last Part, Section 22").

The other important element introduced in this section is one of the narrative's central themes - specifically, its exploration of the tensions between the black and white races in America. These tensions are, at varying times throughout the narrative, either an essential, defining factor, or an issue that seems, at least in terms of the relationship between Bix and Jerome, almost irrelevant.

First Part, Sections 4 through 7

First Part, Sections 4 through 7 Summary

4 - The night he and Bix met, Jerome writes, he was watching a team coached by his brother Maurice who was, Jerome comments, off to university to be a psychiatrist and continually practices analyzing people, including the members of his baseball team. Jerome describes how a team from the white league, sponsored by Seven Up, traditionally visits one of the teams in the black league at the beginning of the season, and how on the night of this particular visit, the black team plays well until a spectacular play by the white shortstop, Bix, sends the black team back to the bench.

5 - Jerome then describes how, in the middle of the game, a beautiful white woman showed up and began cheering for Bix who, Jerome comments, merely smiled politely. Jerome comments that he, along with everyone else in the stands, could see there was something going on with the woman other than just cheering (see "Quotes," p. 24), something unpleasant but something she, he thinks, just couldn't help.

6 - As the game finishes, two trucks drive up, one loaded with iced drinks and the other with food. The second truck also has a horn that blasts out "Take Me Out to the Ballgame," which calls to players, spectators, and townspeople alike. As they eat, and as the younger siblings of some of the black players borrow shirts from both the black and the white players, Jerome speaks with the driver of the grill truck. The driver, a white man, reveals that he is the owner of the Seven Up plant, pointing to the company slogan, "You Like It, It Likes You" and saying, "That's the secret of life".

7 - From a vantage point on the stands, Jerome looks for Bix, but can't see him. He suddenly becomes angry, imagining that Bix has gone home with his mother because he thinks he's too good to spend time with black people (see "Quotes," p. 32). He sees his own mother looking for him, but runs off on his own, still angry, shouting at the truck when the horn blares out one more time.

First Part, Sections 4 through 7 Analysis

There are several important elements in this section. Perhaps the most important is how the portrayal of race relations in the America of the time (see "Style - Setting") - disadvantaged blacks, children paying no attention to differences in race (i.e. not caring whose shirt they borrow), an occasional open minded and compassionate white person (i.e. the truck driver), and black frustration / rage, grounded in an assumption of white racism. Other key elements include the first appearance of Bix's mother, who doesn't appear again until the book's final moments (see "Last Part, Section 27") in which her encounter with Bix puts even more distance between them than the encounter here. In other words, her appearance here foreshadows both the event and the emotional effect of her appearance at the end of the book. Finally, there is the first appearance of Bix

himself who is portrayed, at least while playing baseball, as a kind of idealized heroic figure but who, even in these first glimpsed appearances, also clearly has difficulties that become clearly and vividly apparent as the narrative continues to unfold.

Second Part, Sections 8 through 10

Second Part, Sections 8 through 10 Summary

8 - Jerome describes the route to "the prettiest little concrete half court basketball place in town," hidden in a grove of trees. Writing in third person ("You can have this court anytime by yourself..."), Jerome describes how a hawk sometimes watches him as he practices, how great it feels to play there, and how it's possible to play there both summer and winter.

9 - Jerome says that he spent most of his summers alone at that secret basketball court, describing the one day he wasn't alone, but was accompanied by an acquaintance named Poke, whose presence, Jerome comments, ruined being at the court on his own for a while (see "Quotes," p. 42). Jerome describes how he eventually got his sense of privacy back and that, "It felt exactly right, although [he]later found out it wasn't".

10 - Jerome describes how his momma was the first person to notice he was behaving strangely. After commenting on how well she deals with other people, focusing on who they are and what they do rather than who they're not and what they don't do (see "Quotes," p. 45), Jerome describes how one day, she asked him why he was talking to himself. At first he thinks she's made a mistake, but then pays attention to himself and realizes that, while he's practicing the basketball moves he's been honing all his life ("The moves make the man," he comments) and thinking about them while at home, he's narrating them to an unseen opponent, something he's never done before. He continues to pay attention to himself, and realizes that the unseen opponent is the white shortstop, and that he is using the moves to humiliate the shortstop. He describes what he's been doing as foolish, comments on how he made himself stop for the last two weeks of summer, and how he reveals that he not only had no fun, but lost all his moves. He writes of being worried, but then comments that "this thing with the school ... took [his] mind right off the problem. At least for a while."

Second Part, Sections 8 through 10 Analysis

This section marks the beginning of the actual story - specifically, the narration of Jerome's journey of transformation from solitary, angry, self-motivated boy to a young man who has experienced friendship, affection, and the motivation / desire to help another. In short, this section marks the beginning of Jerome's coming of age, triggered by his relationship with Bix, an imaginary relationship in this section (fueled, at least to some implied degree, by the racial difference between the two) that becomes more and more real as the narrative progresses. Another important element in this section includes the appearance of Jerome's mother, who through both her presence (here and in the novel's final third) and her injury-triggered absence (in the novel's middle third) plays a fundamental and defining role in both the action and in Jerome's interpretation

of that action. Finally, this section introduces the concept of "moves" and how they "make the man," both concepts that play a fundamental role in the novel's action and thematic considerations - specifically, its contemplation of the relationship and/or relative value of truth and honesty. See also "Themes - Honesty vs. Lies" and "Topics for Discussion - Do you agree with Bix ..." and "Do 'lying' moves in basketball ..."

Second Part, Sections 11 through 13

Second Part, Sections 11 through 13 Summary

11 - Jerome and his momma are told that as part of Wilmington's having to obey the new integration regulations, in which black students are to be sent to white schools, Jerome is to be sent to Chestnut Street Junior High School, where he will be the only black student. After commenting on the irony of the situation (see "Quotes", p. 49), and on the people and situations he'd miss by not attending the school he'd planned to attend (Parker), Jerome describes how his mother got angry at the situation, and how she assured him that she wasn't angry at anything he'd done or might do. He also describes how they settled down to their preparations, as they would for any other year, and how, shortly before school starts, they are visited by Jerome's former principal, who assures Jerome of the quality of education at Chestnut and that Jerome is an exceptional student who will continue to do well.

12 - When Jerome starts at Chestnut, he quickly learns that in some ways, people at the white school aren't that much different from people at the black one. He gets into a fistfight once, with a white boy who called him "nigger", but beats him easily. After that, everyone pretty much leaves him alone. He describes his new classes, refers specifically to how much he enjoys French class, which opens up possibilities of exploring new worlds (see "Quotes." p. 60), and how much he hates Communications, with its pretentious teacher Mr. Eggelestobbs and its self-conscious emphasis on body language, which he calls "doody."

13 - Later in the fall, Jerome discovers that the school is holding tryouts for the basketball team. Realizing they've already started and feeling the urge to play but not having a uniform, he hurries into a classroom to find a pair of scissors to cut his pants into a pair of shorts. He discovers that he is being watched by Mr. Egglestobbs, who analyzes his behavior and, pompously, tells him he's deceiving himself. After cutting off his pants, Jerome rushes to the gym, where he discovers that the boys trying out for the team already have uniforms and, according to the coach, have been specially selected from the PE class. Some of the boys make racist jokes, but fall silent when Jerome demonstrates some of his moves. The Coach, clearly a racist, gives Jerome an opportunity to show his playing skills in a pickup game opposite a couple of his best players, but throws the game to the white boys. As the game finishes, one of the white players comments that Jerome could help them win the state championship. As Jerome leaves, all he can hear is the screaming of the coach's whistle.

Second Part, Sections 11 through 13 Analysis

Jerome's enforced transfer to a new school is grounded in historical incident. In the early 1970's, the legally mandated process of "busing," in which black students were sent to schools in white neighborhoods in an effort at desegregation, came into being

with the intent of equalizing educational opportunities and achievements for blacks and whites. In many actual circumstances, the act of putting the law into practice resulted in public demonstrations and violence of a scale not encountered by Jerome here - physical violence, that is. Moral violence, of the sort he encounters in the gym at the hands of the racist coach, was all too prevalent.

Other important elements in this section include the appearance of Mr. Egglestobbs, whose comment about Jerome deceiving himself is a manifestation of the novel's thematic concentration on issues of honesty vs. truth. Here it's important to note that while the portrayal of the character is essentially a comic one, there is truth in what he says - Jerome really is deceiving himself, if he believes merit and skill alone will get him a place on the basketball team. In that sense, Egglestobbs' comments can be seen as foreshadowing events and circumstances in the section that follows the one in which he makes them. Then there is the passing narration of Jerome's discovery of French, and how his work in that class awakens him to new possibilities and new worlds. There is a degree of metaphoric value here, in that this discovery parallels his entry into the "whites only" new world he has just entered.

Second Part, Sections 14 through 16

Second Part, Sections 14 through 16 Summary

14 - Jerome describes his interest in meeting new friends, and his ways of choosing with whom to make friends - in particular, finding people interesting because of their book reports, or their ways of speaking French. He then describes how his attention had been forcibly taken away from meeting friends by a serious head injury suffered by his mother. While she's recovering, Jerome, Henri and Maurice divide the responsibilities at home, with Jerome taking on food preparation and finding it difficult. A short time later, he is called in to visit the school counselor, who attempts to get him to talk about the situation at home. He says, firmly but politely, that things are fine. She then suggests that he learn to cook in home economics class, and Jerome is all set to agree, but then remembers that the class is at the same time as French. When he says he wants to stay in that class, the surprised counselor, who hates French, says the only other time conflicts with Communications, and assumes there is no way he wants to drop that. Jerome, however, convinces her that that is exactly what he wants to do, and she reluctantly signs the paperwork.

15 - As Jerome is leaving the office, the counselor comes after him and tells him he won't be the only boy in the class. The other, she says, is named Braxton Rivers the Third, whom she calls a "poor thing." Jerome asks sharply whether Braxton has the same sort of situation at home as he has - specifically, with a mother who might have brain damage. The counselor says the situation isn't exactly like that. Jerome pointedly says that Braxton is lucky. The counselor says, "We'll see," and returns to her office.

16 - Jerome is late for his first Home Ec class because Mr. Egglestobs, signing the permission form to drop Communications, insists upon lecturing him about how athletics is preventing him from discovering the truth about himself. When Jerome arrives in Home Ec, the girls in the class and their teacher, Miss Pimton, are both surprised by his arrival. Miss Pimton suggests that he partner with Baxter, much to the relief of Baxter's former lab partner, Matty Sue. Jerome agrees, and sits at the table where Baxter, who is absent that day, usually sits. He watches as the girls in the class chatter away its final fifteen minutes.

Second Part, Sections 14 through 16 Analysis

The events of Section 14 are important for a couple of different reasons. First, they raise the stakes for Jerome, creating obstacles for him in terms of keeping up his basketball practice and his school work, but perhaps most importantly, robbing him of the immediate and available support and insight of his trusted, much loved mother. Second, the events of this section introduce, and in some ways define, the parallels between the experiences of Bix, Jerome, and their respective mothers (see "Topics for Discussion - Discuss the parallels ..."). These parallels are foreshadowed, albeit quite obliquely, in

Jerome's exchange with the counselor, which implies that Braxton is not as lucky as Jerome seems to think he is. Finally, there is Jerome's first appearance in Home Ec class, an interesting moment because there is the sense that the girls are thrown not so much by his being black as by his being male. In other words, race is less of a big deal here than gender, a somewhat surprising situation given the narrative's clear focus on issues related to racism.

Second Part, Sections 17 through 19

Second Part, Sections 17 through 19 Summary

17 - After a weekend of meals made out of a package, Jerome arrives at his next Home Ec class ready to learn to cook, and just as ready to meet his partner. He is taken completely by surprise when his partner turns out to be the shortstop he admired (see "First Part, Section 4"). He is taken further by surprise when he sees that Bix, so confident on the field, now seems shy and uncomfortable. Jerome also notices the untidiness of Bix's clothes contrasted with the shininess of his shoes, commenting that because boys shine their own shoes but their mothers take care of their clothes, "something was wrong with this boy's mother too" (see "Quotes," p. 99). Jerome tries to break the ice with a joke, but is disappointed when, after a brief moment of connection, Bix retreats into private silence. Jerome then describes the girls' excitement as they practice making hamburger patties out of paper mache, and comments that when, "we finally started on our first edible project ... I was in for the worst sight yet of White Man's Nonsense."

18 - The next class sees Miss Pimton instructing the students in how to make a mock apple pie with, among other things, Ritz Crackers. Although the girls are excited, Jerome challenges her to explain why they're making what amounts to fake food. As the girls watch in shock (Jerome commenting in narration that they're probably thinking he's showing his true, rude colors), Bix joins in, forcing Miss Pimton to admit that such a pie is less tasty, less economical, and less nutritious than real pie. Jerome comments in narration that this was more like the shortstop he liked and admired, concludes their argument by saying the only reason they're making it is because they CAN, and then comments in narration on how he realized what his argument actually means (see "Quotes," p. 106). The silence that greets his words is eventually broken by the girls, who busily get down to work, both making the pie and ignoring the boys. The boys look at each other (see "Quotes", p. 107) and then make their own pie, joking all the while. Jerome comments, in narration, that he figured he had found a best friend.

19 - Miss Pimton is surprised to see how well and how quickly the boys' pie comes together. The girls ask that the best looking pie be the one to be baked first, and Miss Pimton sets up an anonymous contest, so no one but her knows whose pie is whose. The boys' pie is the one picked, and Jerome comments that some of the girls knew, and resented it. When Miss Pimton arranges for the pie to be tested by a passing teacher, Bix reacts fearfully, becoming more so when the unsuspecting teacher calls the pie an apple pie. The pleased applause from the girls and Miss Pimton quickly falls silent when Miss Pimton notices that Bix has climbed into a chair in the corner and is cutting into himself with his own fingernails. As Jerome attempts to calm him down, Bix cries out that everyone is telling lies, and that people should always tell the truth. Bix starts to calm down when Jerome calls him Bix instead of Baxter, but then continues to insist that what they've done is create lies (see "Quotes," p. 117). Jerome takes him to the nurse's

office, where he falls asleep. Jerome realizes they both smell like blood and the cinnamon in the pie, and refers to them as "cinnamon blood brothers."

Second Part, Sections 17 through 19 Analysis

Of the several important elements introduced in this section, perhaps the most essential and the most relevant is the first actual meeting between Jerome and Bix. Their initial unease, their eventual quick alliance, and their ultimate, equally quick bonding as "cinnamon blood brothers" combine to foreshadow the volatility, the mutual need, and the mutual affection that defines their relationship throughout the rest of the book. Another, almost equally important, element introduced here is Bix's almost psychotic resistance to telling, or even participating, in a lie. His reaction to the lies told by Miss Pimton and the girls is disturbing in its extremity, to the point that it almost seems as though the author is implying that Bix is, on some level and to some degree, as mentally ill as his mother. Even if that's not the case, the intensity of Bix's reaction foreshadows the profound, almost dangerous intensity of his similar reactions to similar circumstances later in the novel.

A related, similarly important element is the introduction of the Ritz Cracker Pie, or "mock apple" pie by Miss Pimton. There are several interesting points to note here. The fact that it's a real pie is one, the recipe showing up in recognized cookbooks. Another is its trigger for the previously discussed revelation of Bix's abhorrence of lying. A third interesting point about the pie is that its appearance here foreshadows the appearance of an identical pie later in the narrative - specifically in "Last Part, Section 26", in which Bix brings just such a pie to dinner with Jerome and his family. This, in turn, relates to another important point - the reference to the pie being a "mock apple" pie. The term "mock" is the thing to note here, since when Bix brings the pie to dinner with Jerome's family, he is in a sense "mocking" them and their hospitality. Finally, there is the reference in Jerome's narration to it being a "cracker" pie, "cracker" being, like "mock," a word with, in this context, a double meaning. In the language of racial conflict in America "cracker" is a derogatory term used by blacks to describe low class white people; the term is similar in connotation to "white trash." Thus, in referring to the pie as a "cracker" pie, Jerome is not only referring to its ingredients, but the fact that it was invented and seems to be prized by white people, the term implying that they are in fact low class. In short, the pie is a powerful, satirical symbol and/or manifestation of the novel's thematic exploration of racial tension.

Third Part, Sections 20 and 21

Third Part, Sections 20 and 21 Summary

20 - Bix is absent from school for the next week, and leaves Home Ec class completely. Jerome describes in narration how he was concerned about him, but was too busy to track him down - with Home Ec, in which he was actually learning to cook real food, with cooking at home, where his brothers were actually looking forward to what he prepared, and, eventually, helping his mom, who finally comes home from the hospital. She's slower, quieter, and weaker, but eventually becomes stronger and more talkative. Even though he's worried that some of her thinking might have been damaged (see "Quotes," p. 124), Jerome is relieved she's back, eventually telling her everything that happened with Bix and surprising himself by crying about it. Mamma realizes that he's been neglecting his basketball, and that his brothers have also been neglecting their other activities, and encourages them to get back into their old routines.

21 - Jerome looks for a new place to practice basketball, since his favorite court is too far away to get to on his school-day schedule. He finds one in the yard of a burnt-out school near some train tracks, and sets up a practice routine, developing a new passing move. One night while practicing, he realizes that a train has stopped, and that he is being watched - not just by passengers, but by a jeering black crewman (see "Quotes," p. 133). Jerome endures his taunts for as long as he can, but after a while has enough and challenges the crewman to a game of one-on-one. The crewman then calls up a big man named Bobo, whom the trainman says is in line for a professional team. He also collects wagers from the white passengers, and bets his silver lantern against Jerome's ball that Bobo will win. When they play, Jerome's speed and skill blast past Bobo, and he wins free and clear. After smacking Bobo across the head, the resentful crewman grabs the lantern and runs for the now moving train. A couple of the passengers, however, block him from getting on until he leaves Jerome the lantern. The train disappears, and Jerome goes home with his prize. His mother is insistent that he return it, but Maurice insists that Jerome won the lantern fair and square, and therefore has the right to keep it. Jerome agrees, and finally so does his mother, who says she doesn't want to see it shining from under Jerome's door late at night. Jerome says the only place anyone will see it is on a darkened basketball court.

Third Part, Sections 20 and 21 Analysis

Aside from the return of Jerome's mother, which also marks the return of support and a degree of stability to his life in spite of her initial infirmity and weakness, the most important element in this section is the introduction of the silver lamp. There are several points to note here. The first is that its appearance foreshadows the important role it eventually plays in the unfolding of the Bix/Jerome relationship, while the second is its metaphoric representation of the powerful illuminating presence of truth that defines Bix's identity and which, in some important ways, ultimately comes between the two

friends. The third important point related to the appearance of the lantern is how it triggers the exploration of another facet of the work's interest in racism. In this case, the exploration is of a kind of internalized racism, in which the actions of the black trainman and of Bobo can be seen as turning the impotent, toxic hatred they feel, but can never express, towards the white people who oppress them onto someone even more vulnerable. In other words, the confrontation between Jerome, the train man and Bobo might be viewed as a classic case of the bullied turning around and doing the bullying, of someone with little power exerting power over someone else who has even less. The irony here is that the white passengers exhibit a spirit of fair play that, in all likelihood, the black characters including Jerome would find at least unexpected. The point must be made, however, that this is not the only positive portrayal of white people in the book; recall, for example, how the white Seven-Up employee acted with unconditional generosity towards the black people in "First Part, Sections 6 and 7." It's even possible that in the actions of these white people, the reader can see an additional level of meaning, or at least implication, in the book's title; in the case of these generous whites, the "moves" do indeed make the man, albeit a different kind of man than the people on the receiving end of that generosity might expect.

Third Part, Section 22

Third Part, Section 22 Summary

22 - The next night, Jerome takes his lantern to his favorite baseball court, the one that used to be too far away to use; now, with his lantern, he's able to both light the court while he plays and his way home. In spite of the lantern's powerful glow, he feels a bit nervous going down the darkened path to the court, becoming even more so when he hears some strange sounds - a bouncing basketball, the bang of the ball on the backboard, a voice counting quietly. He sneaks up to the court but is unable to see who's playing until he suddenly aims the previously shaded light onto the court, and discovers that the player is Bix. At first, Jerome hides in the shadows, pretending to be an alien from Saturn searching for earth-people games, and Bix plays along, saying that he is playing bounceball. Soon, however, Jerome is unable to restrain his laughter, and it explodes out of him. When Bix realizes who Jerome is, he becomes angry, and accuses him of lying. Jerome tries to convince him he was only joking, but Bix becomes even more angry (see "Quotes," p. 155), shouting that he never lies. Jerome calms him down, and Bix explains that he really was playing a game called bounceball which, he reveals in a tense conversation, he invented because he had nobody around to teach him to do anything else with the ball his stepfather loaned him. Surprised at Bix's explosion of anger and bitterness, Jerome agrees when Bix asks to hold the lantern, and then becomes even more surprised when Bix expertly spins it, so quickly that it creates a globe of light. As he spins it, Bix's anger transforms into joy that lingers even when he stops spinning the lantern, and then gives it a name - Spin Light. Jerome comments in narration how he called it Spin Light from then on, "the lantern being the kind of thing so good you can name it like a pet." Bix then leaves, not answering when Jerome offers to meet him there every night, but laughing when Jerome promises to bring Spin Light. Jerome then comments in narration that it is only since he got the notebook that he knows "what was so weird and neat and secret and funny about [Bix] looking at the lantern like he did, and puzzling at it and then laughing and saying what he said." In the notebook, Jerome says, Bix wrote, "I will play my game beneath the Spin Light."

Third Part, Section 22 Analysis

The metaphoric value of the silver lantern and the light it casts manifests in several ways throughout this section, all of which depend on a base symbolism - the lantern and its light as representatives of truth. If that premise is taken as read, then the first variation on this theme appears in the first part of this section, in which the light of the lantern illuminates the way to the basketball court which, for Jerome and for the reader, represents Jerome's most significant source of happiness and connection with his own individual identity. The second variation on this theme comes when Bix reveals the nature of, and reasons for, the game of bounceball; in other words, the light of the lantern affords Jerome a glimpse of Bix's truth. Then there is Bix's action in spinning the

lantern, creating what amounts to a halo of light similar to the halo of truth he imagines himself having, displaying, and acting upon. There is also the bond that both the lantern and the light create between Jerome and Bix, a true friendship, perhaps the first for each of them. Finally, there is the reference to the light being named Spin Light, which is itself important for a couple of reasons. On one level, it answers the question raised by the reference to Spin Light way back in First Part, where it was discussed in relation to Bix's notebook,a discussion echoed here in this section's final moments. On another level, there is Bix's reference to "playing the game beneath Spin Light," which can be seen as tying all these points together. Bix, who seems on some level to be aware that Spin Light is an embodiment of truth, vows to play and live within the light of that truth - of himself, and of his friendship with Jerome.

Last Part, Sections 23 and 24

Last Part, Sections 23 and 24 Summary

23 - In detailed narration, Jerome describes how, over the course of about six weeks, he taught Bix the basics of playing basketball, and how in the process they seemed to be becoming very close friends. He narrates a conversation in which Jerome actually asks whether Bix considers them best friends and Bix challenges his need to have everything affirmed in words, referring in particular to how psychiatrists all use words and how the way they use them is stupid. As a result, Jerome realizes he doesn't need to talk as much as he thought he did (see "Quotes", p. 173). He goes on to comment, in narration, on how good and natural Bix is at basketball, how quickly he becomes really good, and how after a while all Bix needs is to add some "moves" to his game, fakes and gestures to confuse the other players. The truth-obsessed Bix insists that he can, and will, play well without injecting the dishonesty of fakes / moves into his game. Jerome taunts him, reminding him of his strange behavior in the Home Ec classroom (see "Second Part - Section 19") and speaking cruelly about "that great terrific game of games, bounceball." He then grabs Spin Light, drops the shade over it, and walks away, commenting in narration that he didn't want to leave in the light.

24 - Jerome describes how, for about two months, he didn't see Bix at all, and went back to practicing basketball on his own, and in his own way, with moves and fakes. He writes of how quickly he got his smoothness and speed back, how aggressive he became, and of how he attempted to imagine himself playing against Bix as he had before (see "Second Part, Section 10"), but wasn't able to do so. One night, he is surprised to see Bix standing at the edge of the court watching him. Eventual conversation reveals that Bix's mother has been placed into a mental hospital (see "Quotes," p. 191), that his stepfather is deliberately keeping him from seeing her, that they argue about it constantly, and that in their most recent and most intense argument, Bix challenged him to a game of one-on-one. If Bix wins, he says, he'll get to see his mother. If his stepfather wins, Bix will never ask about his mother again. Bix also says that his stepfather, a former high school basketball star, has no idea that Bix has been learning to play. For that reason, Bix says, and because he is so much younger and faster and truer than his stepfather, he'll win. Jerome tells him that that's not likely, simply because the stepfather will play with fakes and moves, while Bix will not. Bix insists that he will play honestly, adding that he wants Jerome to bring Spin Light and to referee. Jerome continues to insist that Bix doesn't have a chance, but Bix ignores him, adding that he wants Jerome to accompany him to the mental hospital. Jerome asks why - "To keep you on the truth, to make sure you don't tell no lies to your momma?" Jerome describes, in narration, his regret at saying what he did, regret that deepened as Bix walked away silently. He says, in narration, that at that moment he realized he was going to turn up for the game between Bix and his stepfather, but that he wasn't sure he would be able to help Bix anymore.

Last Part, Sections 23 and 24 Analysis

Among the important points to note in this section are Bix's comments about psychiatrists, which seem to imply that he has some experience with them, either in terms of having therapy himself, which is possible, given his behavior in the Home Ec classroom, or of remembering the lies he's been told about his mother. Also important to note are the occasions when Jerome's temper gets the better of him and he speaks sharply and certainly disrespectfully to Bix. It's not entirely clear where this nastiness comes from - impatience, frustration, or a subconscious desire to drive away his best friend - but whatever the core reason, the fact remains that Jerome's actions can clearly be seen as an echo of the actions taken against him by Bobo and the train man - in other words, the bullied becoming the bully.

Other important elements here are the various revelations about Bix's home situation - among them the hospitalization of his mother, echoing Jerome's comment in "First Part, Section 1" about her being in an insane asylum and simultaneously foreshadowing Bix's visit to her in "Last Part, Section 27 - and his accusations of his stepfather's control. This last is particularly interesting, in that it creates in the reader, in all likelihood, a preconception of who the stepfather is and what he is like, a preconception perhaps nourished by Bix's evident vulnerability and need. That preconception, however, might very well be dispelled by the surprisingly humane portrait of the stepfather that emerges in the following sections.

Finally, the metaphoric connection between Spin Light and truth, or at least Bix's conception of truth, develops further in this section. Here, Bix's insistence that the game be played in Spin Light's glow can be seen as representing and/or manifesting Bix's conviction that his truth, his values, his beliefs, will triumph over what he perceives as the evil perpetrated by his stepfather. Ironically, however, Bix's truth turns out to be as self-deceptive as Jerome's beliefs in the universal worth of his basketball skills (Second Part, Section 13), with the real truth about Bix's mother and the circumstances of his home life emerging beneath Spin Light's merciless glare in the following sections.

Last Part, Sections 25 and 26

Last Part, Sections 25 and 26 Summary

25 - When Jerome arrives at the basketball court, he is surprised to see Bix's stepfather already there, dressed and moving like a real player, warming up by the light of a flashlight. As Jerome is realizing that Bix is in real trouble, Bix arrives, and while the stepfather is surprised to learn that Bix has invited a referee, he agrees to play. As the game starts, Jerome realizes right away just how much trouble Bix is in; his stepfather is faking and moving like a real player. After about seven of his stepfather's points and two of his own (both of which, Jerome comments in narration, were allowed by the stepfather), Bix realizes the situation and simply stops playing, presenting himself as superior by not playing a false game. The stepfather tells the worried Jerome that Bix has done this kind of thing before, and then proceeds, to the increasing horror of both Bix and Jerome, to tell how Bix's devotion to the truth affected his relationship to his mother. The mother, he says, on an occasion when she was particularly unstable, asked Bix whether he loved her, and Bix, in the name of absolute truth, said he didn't. Bix protests that in the moment he didn't love her because she was being so strange, but the stepfather ridicules him (see "Quotes," p. 220) and describes how Bix's mother then tried to kill herself. He then prepares to leave, but Bix challenges him to keep playing. The stepfather is clearly tired, but agrees. As soon as Bix starts playing, both the stepfather and Jerome see that he is incorporating fakes into his game, playing with moves, doing so beautifully (see "Quotes," p. 224), but screaming in tortured frustration every time. Bix quickly wins, and as he's leaving, announces that the visit to his mother will happen the following Friday. As Jerome prepares to leave, the stepfather asks whether he taught Bix all those moves. Jerome says he didn't, saying that when he tried to teach Bix about fakes, Bix said they were lies. The stepfather comments that Bix "is one hell of a liar ow, isn't he." Jerome takes Spin Light and goes, leaving the stepfather behind shooting baskets in the dark (see "Quotes," p. 226).

26 - When Jerome tells his momma about Bix's situation and everything that happened on the basketball court, she tells him he can go with Bix to the mental hospital, but adds that she'd like to meet Bix before the trip, inviting him to supper. When Jerome issues the invitation at school, Bix agrees, and Jerome and his momma plan an elaborate dinner (see "Quotes", p. 231). When he arrives with his covered dessert, and as they all sit down to dinner (Jerome's brothers are there as well), Bix is entertaining and charming and witty, but only Jerome can see that Bix is putting moves on his family the way he put moves on his stepfather. Finally, when Bix brings in his dessert, Jerome is shocked and angered to see that it's a mock apple pie like the one from Home Ec. Jerome watches as his brothers happily devour the pie and Bix encourages them, realizing that his momma, who only takes one bite, has sadly realized exactly what she is eating. After Jerome's brothers go outside, his momma leads Bix out, but before they go, Jerome comments that Bix is "too screwed up for words." Bix responds by saying, "Which is why I'm such a good buddy for you, isn't it," and then goes out with momma. While they're gone, Jerome contemplates everything that happened (see "Quotes," p.

243) and realizes he needs to think about Bix in a new way. He then describes how he came to some new understandings about Bix (see "Quotes," p. 243 - 2) and goes to bed.

Last Part, Sections 25 and 26 Analysis

The confrontation on the basketball court between Bix and his stepfather is notable for the truths it reveals about each of them, truths that emerge under the brilliant, metaphorically significant, perhaps inevitable glow cast by Spin Light. The irony at work here is that the truth leads Bix into what he considers to be lies, both on the basketball court and at Jerome's home. These lies, in turn and in spite of his howled-out rage and frustration and self-hatred, draw him closer to what he believes and/or needs to be the truth (that his mother, in spite of her illness, still loves him) but also inevitably, painfully, to the real truth - that she no longer even knows who he is.

Meanwhile, Bix's behavior in the dinner party scene is clearly strange and almost incomprehensible, unless the reader considers the bullied bully motif that appears throughout the book. In the same way as the trainman and Bobo took out their helpless anger on Jerome, and in the same way as Jerome took out his helpless anger on Bix, Bix now takes his anger out on Jerome's family (an idea supported by Bix's comment, as he goes, about how they're such "good budd[ies]" for each other. In short, Bix mocks and victimizes Jerome and his family, albeit to a much less violent, much less damaging degree, in the same way as he himself has been victimized - by his father, by his best friend (Jerome), and by life in general. Meanwhile, for further consideration of the metaphoric value of the pie, see "Second Part, Sections 17 through 19 - Analysis".

Finally, it's important to note that the narrative never communicates the content of the conversation that takes place between Bix and Jerome's mother. For further consideration of this intriguing omission, see "Topics for Discussion - Imagine and write down ..."

Last Part, Sections 27 and 28

Last Part, Sections 27 and 28 Summary

27 - After a long, uncomfortable wait, Jerome is eventually picked up by Bix and his stepfather. He tries making small talk about the car, but gets very little response. Instead, Bix asks for his help in getting his baseball glove ready for summer, going through a ritual of oiling, waxing and massage that he says marks the beginning of his favorite time of year - the beginning of baseball season (see "Quotes," p. 25). Once the glove is prepared, Bix then talks excitedly about stopping off at Jeb's, a roadside restaurant he goes to every time his stepfather takes him to visit his aunt. When the stepfather says there will be no visit to Jeb's that trip, Bix has a tantrum. The stepfather stops, and he and the two boys go into the restaurant, only to leave again in a hurry when Jeb responds with racist anger to Jerome's presence. Back in the car, Bix lapses into deep thought and, in narration, Jerome reveals his perspective on why (see "Quotes," p. 257).

When they arrive at the hospital, Jerome and Bix wait while the stepfather goes to arrange their visit. When Jerome and Bix are shown into the ward where Bix's mother is, Jerome lingers by the door as the stepfather shows Bix to his mother. In narration, Jerome describes watching all the intense emotions of Bix's past few months (anger, frustration, fear, joy) move across his face and disappear (see "Quotes," p. 266). He moves in to kiss her, but stops just short when she asks whose boy he is. And then, Jerome says, Bix pulled the biggest and best move/fake he ever pulled, turning to the old woman in the next bed, embracing her, and calling her mother. His real mother comments on how loving he is, but then starts having an idea. Bix realizes what's going on (i.e. that she's starting to remember him), says goodbye to the old woman, turns, and walks away. Jerome watches him continuing his fake, hurrying away before his mother realizes the truth (see "Quotes," p. 270). As Bix lingers for a moment in the doorway, Jerome whispers a quiet, "See you, Bix," and then Bix is gone, Jerome realizing how little he actually ever knew about his friend (see "Quotes," p. 272). Bix's mother suddenly realizes who had come to visit and starts screaming for him, thrashing desperately in her bed. Jerome tries to help hold her down, but is knocked aside. "I felt myself sliding down the wall," he comments in narration, "And thought I would never hit bottom, and on the way down everything just went white on me."

28 - In narration, Jerome describes how he and the stepfather traced Bix as far as a train station, where he bought a ticket for Washington DC. At the station, Jerome says, the stepfather accused him of helping Bix run away, triggering an argument that stopped only when a group of black men came to Jerome's support. The stepfather then leaves for Washington, commenting bitterly on how Jerome must have taught Bix his moves and faking. Then, Jerome says, he made his way home, where he talked the whole thing out with the sympathetic Maurice, not quite able to talk to Momma. He then describes how one day he got a postcard from Washington - no note, just an address. Jerome realizes it came from Bix, that the message of the card is that Bix plans to lose

himself in the city, where he plans to keep his secrets. Jerome then comments on how the postcard itself might be an expression of Bix's affection for him, but that it could also be yet another move (i.e. fake out). This, in turn, leads Jerome to comment that it's the start of his solo basketball season, and that he's looking forward to going out into the night with Spin Light to see what moves he's still got. He also comments that if he's learned anything about his relationship with Bix, it's that, "If you are faking, somebody is taking", and that, "There are no moves you truly make alone."

Last Part, Sections 27 and 28 Analysis

The book's narrative momentum, given a powerful forward jolt by both the confrontation between Bix and his stepfather and its result, slows down a bit in the first part of Section 27, providing the reader with a bit of breathing room before the climactic confrontation between Bix and his mother. The point is not made that this slower earlier section is devoid of dramatic and/or narrative interest. On the contrary, this section contains the interesting, perhaps even furious description of Bix's obsessive tending of his baseball glove, foreshadowed in the book's opening sections and metaphorically representative of Bix's many unfulfilled dreams such as those of a healthy relationship with his mother, which he has tended with the same obsessive care as he tends the glove. Then there is the sequence of scenes involving Jeb, which itself has a couple of interesting values - portraying the stepfather as perhaps more wise and more sensitive than readers might have initially expected him to be and, simultaneously, reintroducing the thematic motif of racism. Finally, in this first section, there is Bix's tantrum, which reinforces the idea, suggested several times throughout, that he is childlike almost to the point of being mentally under-equipped.

The main body of Section 27 is taken up with the climactic narrative of Bix's visit to the hospital, written in a style that is simultaneously, intriguingly, understated and vivid, horrific in its restrained sense of evoking the scene rather than describing it in detail. There are so many layers to the movement of feeling and character in this scene - the complicated flow of emotion between Bix and his mother triggers his determination to do the right thing (i.e. save his mother pain) even though it means doing what he believes to be the worst possible thing (i.e. telling a lie). He goes even further into this worst possible scenario with his impulsive departure, undertaken to save both of them any further pain but denying his own personal truth, his love for and desire for connection with his mother. These actions suggest that Bix is, in fact, embracing the life and ways and beliefs of a liar even more than he did on the basketball court. Here, it seems, is proof that the moves (i.e. the lies Bix learned to tell) did indeed make the man.

The book's concluding moments, Section 28, draw Jerome's journey of transformation, his coming of age, to a close. He has discovered that, in a world where the results of defining perceptions of black and white along racial lines are simultaneously expected (i.e. the coach) and unexpected (i.e. the white passengers), dividing perceptions of truth and lies into black and white absolutes (as Bix did) can also result in both the expected and the unexpected. In short, the book's thematic contention seems to be that there are shades of gray in both areas, racism and honesty, and that definitive lines between

black and white, between lies and truth, are often, perhaps inevitably, blurred. On the other hand, there are Jerome's and the book's final words, which suggest that perhaps the ultimate victim of physical or emotional violence, manifest and/or motivated in racism or lies, is the one who enacts and/or lives the racism, and enacts and/or lives the lie.

Characters

Jerome Foxworthy

Jerome is the book's narrator and its protagonist. In his early to mid-teens at the time the narrative is set (in the early 1970's - see "Style - Setting"), African-American Jerome undergoes a two tier coming-of-age process over the course of the narrative. On one level, he is undergoing a journey of transformation as a black man, full of self-confidence and self-awareness, developed in a primary blacks-only context, that is challenged by his entering into a whites-only school. There, he encounters racism-defined challenges to his sense of self that to some degree frustrate him but to a greater degree make him more determined than ever to claim and sustain his sense of personal identity. On another level, he undergoes a journey of transformation as a human being, discovering two main things. The first is that his ideal of friendship, or more particularly best friend-ship, is not necessarily the way friendships actually work. The second, and related, thing that he discovers as a human being, through his friendship with Bix Rivers, is that people are not always what they seem, or what others believe them to be. His first impression of Bix is that he is something of a golden boy, particularly when it comes to sport and athletics. As their friendship develops, however, Jerome discovers that beneath his confident and successful exterior, most apparent on the baseball field, Bix is a profoundly troubled young man. Jerome makes the same sort of discovery about Bix's stepfather, whom Bix portrays as something of a monster but who is actually quite sensitive and reasonable. In short, on both tiers of his coming-of-age process, Jerome learns that his personal beliefs and wishes don't necessarily, or automatically, correspond with reality, an experience of growing up that might be described, or perceived, as archetypal and/or universal.

Bix Rivers

Bix is the novel's antagonist, the character whose confrontations with the main character Jerome triggers most of his struggles and transformations. Bix's real name is Braxton Rivers the Third; here, it's interesting to note that the narrative gives little or no indication of who, or what, Braxton Rivers the First and Second were like, or were all about. He, like Jerome, is in his early to mid teens, but unlike Jerome, Bix is white, with all the apparent in-born advantages of being of that race in America in the early 1970's. For further discussion of the implications of the racial differences between the two main characters, see "Themes - Race Relations." In terms of character, Bix is portrayed as idealistic, unstable, perhaps naïve, quite immature, and ultimately self-betrayed by his obstinate resistance to acknowledging the truth. This, in turn, is profoundly ironic, in that Bix is obsessed with TELLING the truth at all times and in all circumstances, unaware that in doing so he is ignoring several profound truths about his life, his mother, his step-father, and the ways of the world.

Bix's Mother

Bix's mother, while a profound influence on the life and character of her son and, through him, on the life and character of Jerome, is nonetheless a relatively minor character, appearing only twice. The first time is in the narrative's very early stages, where she shows up at a baseball game in which Bix is playing, behaves strangely, and makes a strong impression on Jerome. The second time she appears is at the narrative's climax when Bix, after winning a bet with his step-father, is taken to visit her. There he discovers the truth of her condition, of just how dissociated she is from both him and the rest of reality. As a result of his encounter with her, Bix is moved to dissociate himself from everything about his life up to that point, to move away and start who knows what kind of new life. Bix's mother is, in short, an important catalytic character, triggering change in other characters simply by being who and what she is.

Bix's Stepfather

The portrayal of Bix's stepfather is one of the more interesting elements of the book. The reader first gains an impression of him as the result of Bix's description of him, quite a negative impression. Bix portrays him as selfish, a liar, manipulative, and just plain mean. When he actually appears in person, however, he is revealed to be realistic, direct, wise and compassionate in ways that surprise not only narrator Jerome but the reader as well. Here again, as with the character of Bix, the narrative creates a situation in which appearances and/or beliefs are not necessarily representative of the truth, or even a truth.

Jerome's Mother

Throughout the narrative, Jerome's mother is portrayed as a strong, positive presence in the life of all three of her sons. Warm, wise, practical and passionate, she is a fundamental, grounding, realistic presence for all of them. Even when she is injured and in the hospital, her values and needs motivate and define the actions of her three sons. Her compassion and wisdom come most dramatically into play when Jerome invites Bix to join him and his family for dinner, at which time Jerome's mother initially buys into the manipulative game that Bix is playing, but later comes to realize that she and her family are being mocked. It's interesting to note that her conversation with Bix as she's walking out with him after that meal is never reported upon - see "Topics for Discussion - Imagine and write down ..."

Maurice, Henri

Maurice and Henri are Jerome's brothers. Maurice is the elder, an aspiring psychoanalyst with the annoying, but sometimes surprisingly insightful, habit of analyzing everyone around him. Henri is the younger, a relatively unformed character

but with a presence of youthful impulsiveness and relative shallowness that provides an intriguing, defining contrast to the rapidly maturing Jerome.

"Jigaboo," "Nigger," "Cracker"

Both these terms, used several times by characters of one race to refer negatively to characters of another, carry with them negative, racism-defined connotations. "Jigaboos," a term used less universally than "nigger" but equally as offensive, is used by white people to degrade black people. "Crackers" is a term used by black people to degrade poor, uneducated white people. Several times over the course of the narrative, Jerome is referred to personally as a "jigaboo," while his moves and attitudes are sometimes disparaged through the use of the word. Jerome himself uses the word "cracker" several times, both in dialogue and in narration. For commentary on one example of his usage of the word, see "Second Part, Chapter 19 - Analysis".

Mr. Egglestobs, Miss Pimton

These characters are two of the teachers Jerome encounters during his experiences at Chestnut Street Junior High School. Mr. Egglestobs teaches a course called "Communications," in which students study different, non-verbal ways to communicate (i.e. body language). While portrayed as foolish and pretentious, Mr. Egglestobs nevertheless makes perceptive, important comments to Jerome on how he is deceiving himself about his potential for joining the school's basketball team. In other words, he plays an important, if somewhat peripheral, role, in exploring the book's central thematic issue relating to the relationship between truth and lies. Miss Pimton plays a similar role, albeit even more peripherally. She is the Home Economics teacher who teaches her class, including Jerome and Bix, how to make a mock apple pie using, among other things, Ritz Crackers. From Bix's perspective, she is teaching her students how to cook from a position of telling lies. Whether her action is as negative as he perceives it to be is up to debate, but whether it is or it isn't, Miss Pimton's actions and attitudes serve as an important trigger for revelations of Bix's attitudes and belief systems.

The Train Man, Bobo

These two characters challenge Jerome's basketball skills and lose, the bet they make as part of that challenge awarding Jerome a valuable silver train lantern that earns the name "Spin Light" and which, as previously discussed, plays an important literal and metaphorical role in illuminating (pun intended) both action and meaning.

Jeb

This character appears relatively late in the narrative. He is a café owner whom Bix idealizes, but who reveals his true, toxic, racist perspectives to Jerome. Jeb, like Bix's stepfather and Bix himself, is another example of how what one person (in this case

Bix) believes about another person is neither necessarily nor automatically representative of who that person truly is.

Objects/Places

North Carolina

North Carolina is perceived and/or viewed as one of America's so-called Southern States, the part of the United States with the most pronounced, arguably the most entrenched, history and tradition of racism. This makes it a useful, intense setting for a story with a thematic and narrative emphasis on racism, such as this story is.

Wilmington

This is the small city in North Carolina where the action of the narrative takes place.

Jerome's House

Jerome lives in a single parent home with his mother and three brothers. It is a place of refuge, peace and comfort for him, which makes Bix's mocking attitudes and actions when he comes for dinner that much more disrespectful.

Bix's Notebook

In the early stages of the narrative, Jerome describes how he takes Bix's notebook, which is essentially a journal or diary, from his bedroom before Bix's stepfather can get his hands on it. The notebook provides important clues to Jerome, and therefore to the reader, about Bix's thoughts and feelings. It appears again later in the narrative when Bix and Jerome are on their way to visit Bix's mother in the mental hospital, and Bix uses information in the notebook to remind him how to care properly for his cherished baseball glove.

Bix's Baseball Glove

There is the strong sense, throughout the narrative, that Bix's glove is his most precious possession, taking care of it in a detailed, almost obsessive way. It's very telling, and Jerome notes this, that when Bix runs away from home after the encounter with his mother in the mental hospital, he leaves the glove behind. The suggestion is that Bix is abandoning everything he valued in his old life, including his dreams about the love of his mother, in the hope of starting anew, and without the potential for pain.

Basketball

Basketball is Jerome's favorite game, much more exciting to him than baseball. As such, it becomes his means of expressing his identity, and also the primary avenue he uses to develop and sustain his friendship with Bix. Ironically, basketball is also a key component and/or trigger of/for the breakdown of Bix's sense of self. His game of one-on-one with his stepfather awakens in him a grudging awareness of the need for lies, while his victory in that game is the trigger / catalyst for the traumatizing visit he pays to his mother in her mental hospital.

Jerome's Secret Basketball Court

Because Jerome is more interested, and in many ways both more able and more willing, to practice basketball on his own rather than with the school team, he spends his time on a small, isolated, almost overgrown basketball court. There he practices his moves, there he teaches Bix how to play, and there the confrontation between Bix and his stepfather plays out. For consideration of the metaphoric values of the basketball court, see "Topics for Discussion - What do you think ..."

Chestnut Street Junior High School

This is the whites only school that Jerome is forced to attend as a local manifestation of national efforts to end racial segregation.

The Mock Apple Pie (s)

On two occasions, a mock apple pie made with crushed Ritz Crackers and flavored with cinnamon plays an important role in defining and/or shaping the relationship between Jerome and Bix. See the analyses for "Second Part, Sections 17 through 19" and also "Last Part, Sections 25 and 26."

The Train Lantern (Spin Light)

The solid silver train lantern is won by Jerome as the result of a bet placed on his one-on-one basketball game with a hulking, slow moving black train assistant. For discussion of the various metaphoric values of the lantern, see "Third Part, Section 22."

The Duke Hospital

This is the hospital to which Bix's mother is sent, which Bix is initially prohibited from visiting by his stepfather. Bix's one-on-one victory over his stepfather on the basketball court enables Bix to visit his mother. During that visit, in a scene that constitutes the

book's climax, Bix discovers that she has completely dissociated herself from him and from her reality.

Washington DC

Bix goes to Washington DC when he runs away from North Carolina to escape his past.

Themes

Race Relations

For a book set in the Southern United States in the early 1970's, a time and place of intense racial tension (see also "Style - Setting"), exploration of the issue of race relations in The Moves Make the Man is surprisingly understated. The point is not made to suggest that the issue is not present; on the contrary, there are a number of powerfully described confrontations, such as the battle of wills between Jerome and the basketball coach in "Second Part, Section 13, in which race is the motivating factor. As well, the events of the story proper are set in motion by an action (the black Jerome being transferred to an all white school) taking place within the context of a national effort to reduce racism. But ultimately, the story is not actually ABOUT racism, which in fact is a secondary theme / issue when compared to the book's predominant interest in the relative value of honesty and lies.

That said, the book does contain some interesting comments on the question of racism - the fact that race doesn't really seem to matter when it comes to the development of the friendship between Jerome and Bix (although it is true that in moments of tension in that friendship, they both resort to racist taunts and epithets). Then: it's one of the book's most significant ironies, however, that racial preconceptions are on some level turned inside out. The white character with the most apparent socio-cultural-economic advantages (Bix) turns out to be the one with the most unstable interior and/or emotional life. By contrast, the black character with the least socio-cultural-economic status (Jerome) turns out to be the one with not only the strongest sense of self confidence and self-worth, but also the one with the strongest, most supportive and stable home life.

In short, while race plays a significant role in defining and shaping both the narrative and the lives of the characters it portrays, it is less of a thematic concern than the book's primary focus - the tension between, and the relative values of, honesty and lying.

Honesty vs. Lies

This theme manifests itself throughout the book on several levels, several of which are ironic. The most narratively vital and relevant exploration manifests in the character of Bix, whose world view and relationships with other characters are defined by the obsessively, almost irrationally maintained belief that true, absolute, in-the-moment honesty is the only way to live. Anything that is perceived by him as a lie, everything from Jerome's "moves" on the basketball court to a mock apple pie to a truth that he doesn't want to believe, is viewed by him as both a moral outrage and as something beneath him. Where the irony comes into play is that many of the truths he so strongly believes in are, in fact, illusions ... lies. These include his belief that in spite of her illness, his mother still both remembers and loves him, his belief that his stepfather is

out to get him and, perhaps most pathetically, his belief that no matter what, his version of the truth is reality.

Here it's important to note that Jerome does not have delusions of his own - in other words, belief in lies he tells himself. A primary example of this occurs early in the narrative, when the ridiculous but insightful Mr. Egglestobbs points out that Jerome's belief that his skills alone will be enough to get him onto the basketball team is self-deceiving. Jerome discovers the truth of his comment, and the empty naivety of his beliefs, on the floor of the gym when he is confronted by the racist coach. While there are several aspects to the book's thematic exploration of this issue (including a warning, conveyed through the character of Bix, that too strong a belief in an illusory truth can become madness), its primary thematic point on the subject seems to be this. While it may, on some level, be comforting to believe in an absolute such as the value of truth over lies, there are shades of gray in every situation, every belief system that seems black and white.

Perception vs. Reality

Another of the book's sub-themes is a manifestation of its interest in the relationship between honesty and lies. This is the idea that perception isn't always reality - or, to look at it another way, perception can sometimes become a lie people tell themselves in order to sustain a belief system. There are several vividly portrayed examples of this facet of the honesty/lies tension in the book. The first, and perhaps most narratively relevant, is Bix's perception that his mother still both remembers and loves him, a self-defining, self-deluding reality that shatters once he is forced into an awareness of her true mental/emotional state. Another is Bix's perception, passed on to Jerome, that his stepfather is some kind of manipulative, destructive, hating monster, when in fact he seems to be doing his best to protect Bix from the painful truth that will destroy his fragile, but essential, illusion about his mother. Yet another can be found in the cameo appearance of the viciously racist Jeb, whom Bix believes to be a warmhearted, friendly soul but whose toxic, racist core attitudes manifest the minute, the second he sees Jerome walk into his restaurant. Still another can be found in relation to the pie made by Jerome and Bix in Home Economics class, a pie that is perceived to be made of apples but which is, in fact, made of Ritz Crackers. In all these cases, the narrative and thematic comment is that being open to understanding and/or connecting to reality as it is, not what it is believed and/or longed to be, may cause suffering (as it does when Bix is confronted with the reality of his mother), but is ultimately healthier, not to mention truer.

Style

Point of View

The story is narrated from the first person, past tense point of view - that is, from the perspective of narrator Jerome Foxworthy. This means that the story's events are all recounted and interpreted through the subjective perceptions, insights and reactions of the narrator - in other words, that the book's point of view is limited, as opposed to omniscient (i.e. with the narrator commenting on, or having insight into, the perceptions and experiences of all the characters). First person narratives tend to draw a reader more thoroughly and/or deeply into the lives and experiences of the narrator, particularly when that narrator is also the central character as is the case here. This particular narrative is no exception, although there is an interesting, possibly close to unique aspect of this approach that comes into play when one considers the book's thematic emphasis on perception vs. reality (see "Themes"). Because several events, relationships and situations in the book call into question the value of perception, particularly when faced with a contradictory reality, there is some reasonable question as to whether Jerome's commentary is colored by the limited nature of his perceptions and beliefs. For example, Jerome believes that his skills alone will get him on the basketball team, when in fact his race plays a substantially, troublingly, more significant role. Does this mean that his commentary on, and/or his interpretation of, Bix's life and experiences are similarly lacking in realism? The point is not made to suggest that Jerome is an unreliable narrator. But because the narrative is, to a substantial degree, exploring the difference between what is believed to be and what is, the reader might reasonably be expected to at least be aware that there might be such a difference between what Jerome reports and believes, and what the truth of the situation in question actually was/is.

Setting

As previously discussed (see "Objects/Places - North Carolina"), the book is set in a time and place (the Southern United States in the early 1970's) in which culture and society were, to a substantial degree, defined by both tensions between black and white and efforts to defuse those tensions. The narrative of The Moves Make the Man is defined and, to some degree, motivated by those tensions and by examples of those efforts at defusing them. Racial tensions manifest in the confrontation between Jerome and the racist basketball coach when he first arrives at his new school, when tempers flare between Jerome and Bix, and in the final stages of the narrative, when Jerome is essentially chased out of a restaurant by its white owner. Meanwhile, Jerome's transfer to an all-white school is a reality-based effort to ease those tensions. Integration of black students into white schools was one of the most notable and most obvious examples of the drive towards desegregation in America in the late 1960's and early 1970's.

Meanwhile, it's interesting to consider the question of race relations, as it applies to both setting and theme, in relation to the book's other themes, the tension between honesty and lies, and/or between perception and reality. It could be argued that racist perspectives, attitudes and actions are themselves a lie and/ or a false perception - that the book's setting is an evocation of a dominant, dangerous illusion that was clung to then and is still clung to now in the way that Bix clings to his desperate belief in his mother's continuing love.

Language and Meaning

For the most part, language in this work is used in a relatively straightforward way, recounting the story clearly and simply with occasional flashes of poetic imagery. Perhaps the most notable use of language in the book is its evocation of racism, both in terms of the environment in which Jerome lives and comes of age but also his inner environment, his ways of thinking and responding to the world around him. He is aware of racism, of the challenges presented by racist attitudes and people who have those attitudes, but is in many ways unaware of his personal relationship with racism. He has a powerful sense of self-worth and self-accomplishment, with his confidence in himself almost coming across as arrogance - until, that is, he walks into his new school. This is, perhaps, another manifestation of the narrative's thematic consideration of the relationship between perception and reality (in that Jerome perceives himself to be less of a potential target for racism than he actually is). In any case, it's essential to note that the narrative language of the book is essentially Jerome's language, since he is the story's narrator. Language is therefore reflective of Jerome's intelligence and attitudes, and in particular his perspectives and beliefs about himself and the world. It's a very personal and, at times, intimate sensibility, of a sort that many first person narratives tend to have, with the result that readers are given the opportunity to connect with the narrator and his/her story (in this case his) in ways that a more objective narrative voice is less likely to evoke.

Structure

For the most part, the book's overall narrative structure is essentially linear, moving from incident to incident, from cause to effect, in a fairly clear and connected way - that is, after the first two sections of the opening "First Part," which establish Jerome as narrating the story from a position in time that follows the events in question. In other words, the main body of the narrative is essentially a flashback, an explanation of how the situation established in the opening two sections came into being. That said, the four remaining sections of "First Part" build on the exposition of those first two sections to function as a kind of prologue, or introduction to the main body of the narrative, which kicks into gear when Jerome starts his new school - change of physical location/setting, change of narrative focus. The so-called "Second," "Third" and "Last" parts are all defined by this revised narrative focus, following Jerome as he moves through and/or motivates a chain of events set in motion by his transfer to the whites only Chestnut Street school. That chain of events gains in emotional intensity and narrative

momentum as it moves forward, each section within each part functioning as an important link in that chain as Jerome accumulates insight and foresight. If there is a weakness in the book's structure, it is the sense that the ending is somewhat abrupt - inevitable, in that the reader has probably been able to sense all along that Bix's dreams of a positive relationship with his mother are far too unrealistic to be sustainable, but nonetheless truncated to the point of some potential dissatisfaction. Bix walks away, Jerome gets a postcard, and that's basically that. There is little or no denouement, little or no falling action, little or no commentary or analysis. It's almost as though someone blows a whistle on a basketball game before the buzzer goes, or someone ends a baseball game after the seventh inning ... in short, as though the chain of events triggering and defining Jerome's journey of transformation is missing a link or two.

Quotes

"...I almost jumped right into their high service mumbo and told them what they were about - that would have been a sight, this skinny kid black as a clarinet wailing out a licorice tune right there on the light blue carpet aisle cutting off that organ with the fake pipes just as it wheezed into one of their wavery old hymns. But it would not have done a bit of good. When people are set to hear bad things, that is what they will hear." First Part, p. 4

"I got seven straight grades of all A in English, six in black schools that were harder than the white one, which nobody believes. The lunches were better at the colored schools too, but nobody buys that either." Ibid, p. 6

"...first time I ever cried about Bix, feeling like I had lost something and then feeling like I did not know if I ever had it. Bix was gone and worse the Bix I used to dig was gone even before he left and I didn't know where either of them was but he left his glove behind, which he must be unhappy without regardless of being the old Bix or the new." Ibid, p. 9

"...it wasn't just plain old momma's love made her holler. Not just enthusiasm because her boy was making good plays either. There was something else, something she was straining to have or make up for, to Bix and to her too. It was very complicated and I couldn't figure it out clearly but I could see it without doubt." Ibid, p. 24

"Man, it was so strange the way I latched onto this sudden hate like hate was precious and not by no means to be let go of." Ibid, p. 32

"Being alone in a place is one of those things you can only have for one long spell, and when you break it you are never quite the same again, you cannot get it back exactly right." Second Part, p. 42

"You don't go looking at the things people don't do, when they already be doing plenty in other areas. If your son collects stamps, why you want to go fussing at him because he doesn't play the clarinet? Check out his stamps, man." Ibid, p. 45

"I never needed to pretend anything. I never needed to imagine I was going against somebody. I never needed anything but my own self making my own game, and it didn't feel selfish or anything stupid and lonely, because I was not retreating or being shy. I was just playing and concentrating on the thing right there, right then." Ibid, p. 47

"But since it was always made a thing of that the crackers were the ones doing the keeping out, then it was made a thing of that they had to start letting jigaboo boys and girls into their schools. Nobody ever thought to make the jigaboos let little crackers into their schools. Always it was them that did the keeping out and letting in." Ibid, p. 49

"The Nut was like a city, and it had its rich and poor and jocks and brains and pretties and uglies and mopes and clowns, all thrown together like anyplace else." Ibid, p. 56

"Man, that room was something special to me, a little world by itself. When I walked in I felt completely new. I never realized before then how much my way of talking was what made me who I thought and other people thought I was. Take away your habits with the words, and check out who is left, and you see that a lot of things can be fixed if you let them go with the lingo." Ibid, p. 60

"I figured dudes must be able to learn as well as girls how to knock some food together, though nobody usually thought to teach us. I mean, our hands don't grow a certain peculiar way makes them unable to grasp a spatula or an oven knob." Ibid, p. 86

"On the whole it was no wonder the girls treated him creepy. He was like a pup begging you not to kick him and girls like that cannot resist getting a foot on such helplessness." Ibid, p. 99

"She looked at Bix and me when she said this with her eyes full of important meaning. I realized she was thinking we would actually take this tricky glop home and feed it to our poor starving families, bless our poor undernourished little hearts." Ibid, p. 103

"Then I thought to myself, that is white man's disease, thinking you must do whatever you can dream up just because you're so smart. And it is black man's disease to wish they had the same inclination." Ibid, p. 106

"We stared into each other's eyes there for a long time, heat growing and light moving very sure between us, and it was great, grand in the chest and fluttery in the stomach as we forgot everything else and took each other to each. I don't remember feeling the smile start to come on my face or noticing it start on his, but suddenly I felt my cheeks hurt and saw his smile too, and my eyes had those good tears that stay inside, his too, I think. We knew each other could do anything together." Ibid, p. 107

"...it's a million lies and they can't make me a part of it. It's us tricking him and him tricking us back and tricks and lies, and soon it's gone and nobody knows the truth and you can go crazy in there." Ibid, p. 117

"I couldn't help think a crash like Momma's would maybe bust a few quicknesses, cut some of the sense for truth, and you would not be able to notice what was not there any longer. Shifts and misses, you do not see them for themselves probably when they go, like losing a half step in basketball when your ankle is a little stiff. Thought is about something and you pay mind to what it is about, not how quick and right it came." Third Part, p. 124

"At the rest of the windows stretching back off to his right were all these white faces looking out at me, all these northern city people sitting there comfy as bugs on a dog, with their mouths closed and little smiles on their faces, on their way down to Florida to get a suntan and suck up some oj, riding this nice train on a winter's day and getting a little extra entertainment from a little nigger outside and a big nigger inside." Ibid, p, 133

"I had one of those feelings you can never expect or remember because you get them very few times, only when ... things you thought were separate [hook] up behind your back. When you are a smart kid like me you get so you think nothing can sneak up on you. The things you know about you know everything. The people you know do not meet other people you know without you making it happen yourself. People stay put in the places you know them in." Ibid, p. 151.

"'...the honest man does not care if what a person says sounds weird, he just goes ahead and believes him because, see, he has trust that nobody will lie because HE never does.'" Ibid, p. 155 - Bix.

"As much as basketball was lessons for Bix I thought the quiet was lessons for me, and I came to let myself believe he was right about the way those things happened between us, and I let go of a lot of my questions. Maybe I should have hung onto a few, but it was much easier to believe out there in that light in the clearing in the woods ... that we had things happening between us we did not need to think or talk out." Last Part, p. 173

"'Fakes are lies, cracker pies are lies, jokes are lies, everything is a lie to you that is just a move to everybody else. What is your problem, dude?'" Ibid, p. 179 - Jerome.

"I had never been mysterious to me before ... it was like meeting this new dude, invisible, who was made by the moves, and what they made was, he was me." Ibid, p. 185

"...I shivered hard, for I knew Bix was telling the truth, and I knew even worse that I had seen it even back then, something about that woman that was pitiful and going wrong, and the adults saw it then too and shook their heads. It made me feel very weird that you could see it in a person headed for trouble like that and yet nothing to stop it even though you knew ..." Ibid, p. 191

"I saw right then how foolish Bix had been to turn everything so mean. I think before he started pushing it, the dude was actually feeling friendly and a little sorry for Bix, maybe, and might have taken it a little easy on him. But not now. Now Bix had made it all nasty and tight and the guy was ready to put the screws to him." Ibid, p. 210

" '...he forgets to explain that he is just being truthful, speaking the truth about that one particular moment. See, he could not be expected to think back one hour to when she tucked him into bed laughing with him, nor think ahead to the morning when he knew she would wake him up all smiles and have breakfast ready, nor any other time in his life. No, for the sake of the truth he had to pin down how it was exactly at that moment.'" Ibid, p. 220 - Bix's stepfather

"There was something else he was chasing in Bix and I was chasing it too and it made you just as empty. For when I watched Bix out there, he was very beautiful with his moves in operation, now doing the only thing he lacked to be the prettiest hoops kid around, but also he was very sad out there, and it looked dark inside. The stepfather and I felt the same thing, I bet: we were both out of the picture ... he was playing by himself out on that court." Ibid, p. 224

"Man, I thought, what is it with darkness and these white men? But I was in the dark too, and I stayed that way until I got home." Ibid, p. 226

"Something there I felt like I knew even when I could not see it, something in him that maybe nobody but me recognized ... it was not that I knew what was coming for him, or what mysteries were in back of him, for I did not, and even when I saw the mysteries revealed I was still mystified ... it was looking more complicated all the time with Bix, but inside me I was trying to tell myself it was really feeling simpler." Ibid, p. 228

"I wanted Bix to love Momma. I wanted him to see how grand she was and be knocked out and just love her ... I did not think anything about it might be cruel, flaunting my together momma next to his electric-shock momma crazy in the hospital, I never thought that, and I still don't know if it made any difference, and I never will." Ibid, p. 231

"There really were no words for Bix when he went off my map, and maybe that WAS what kept me coming back to him ... but then a new thought short of shook itself in ... maybe Bix was not strange beyond words - maybe my words had just not caught up with Bix ... it might be he was doing things I SHOULD understand but could not keep up with as long as I sat pat on my smarts." Ibid, p. 243

"It was one of those times when your thinking itself does not come in words anymore like packages of meaning. Instead the thoughts pass into you and out and you are left feeling something without ever having seen the printing." Ibid, p. 243

"And I was right with him, I was sucked right into the hope that things were starting, watching him an artist and a kid at the same time, working his glove and checking it out and full of hope for a new season of nice, straight ground balls ... it was the day things began ... and if bad had pushed you from behind you did not care, for you had made it through." Ibid, p. 250

"Here he had insisted we stop at Jeb's when his stepfather said no, and it had not turned out too nice for anybody, least of all Bix who got the biggest surprise. Now he was on the way to see his mom which he insisted on when his stepfather once again said better not to. Maybe there were more surprises, and maybe he wasn't so sure he was ready for them." Ibid, p. 257

"I read a poem once about an army burning bridges it crossed. The look on Bix's face seemed like he was sniffing some pine smoke in the wind." Ibid, p. 258

"He was taking care of every one of those changes for the last time, and then letting them go, one by one, gone forever ... so when it was over, he was left standing there at the foot of his mother's bed completely clean, free, and ready to start something new. He said in the car about his glove, this was always the first day, and here it was. He could now do whatever he had to." Ibid, p. 266

"...she was thinking as fast as she could, frowning and rubbing her face and looking very intelligent indeed just then, no craziness but just someone feeling a very delicate mistake deep somewhere and going through everything until it is found." Ibid p, 270

"In some ways the dude was not born with eyes, but was like a bat, feeling everything by vibration and reacting to things we could not see, spinning and stopping and sidestepping like there were ghosts in between us people." Ibid, p. 272

Topics for Discussion

Discuss the parallels in the narrative's two main mother/son relationships (i.e. between Bix and his mother, and between Jerome and his). What values, attitudes and actions in the one contrast and/or illuminate values, attitudes and actions in the other? How do these contrasts and/or parallels relate to the book's primary themes?

How does the Seven-Up company slogan, painted on the side of the van that shows up after the baseball game at the end of "First Part," foreshadow and/or reflect the events and themes of the book?

What do you think is the metaphoric and/or symbolic value of Jerome's secret basketball court (see "Second Part, Section 8")? Consider the events that take place here, the characters who participate in those events, and the personal / emotional circumstances in which those events take place.

Imagine and write down the conversation between Bix and Jerome's mother after the dinner party (see "Last Part, Section 26"). What do you think Jerome's mother says to Bix? What do you think Bix says to her?

Do you agree with Bix that absolute honesty is always the best policy? Or do you agree with Jerome that sometimes, it's both necessary and important to occasionally lie?

Do "lying" moves in basketball make the individual making them a liar? Or are they, as Jerome maintains, a fundamental part of the game? And if that's the case, do you believe that the concept of necessary "lies" (such as those employed in a basketball game) extends to life - that sometimes a successful, happy, safe life depends upon a few necessary lies?

What experiences have you had in which you've had beliefs that have been changed and/or challenged as the result of becoming aware of a new reality? How does such a change make you feel? Have you ever had as strong a reaction to a discovery as Bix has? Or as Jerome has about Bix?