

Scorpions Study Guide

Scorpions by Walter Dean Myers

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Overview

It is important for every ethnic group to have understanding and empathy for members of other groups whose backgrounds and living conditions are different from their own.

Reading allows students to walk vicariously for a short time in the shoes of others, to feel what they feel, and to empathize with their problems.

Scorpions deals with the friendship and loyalty of two twelve-year-old boys, one black and one Puerto Rican.

Neither lives with his father. Jamal lives with his mother and sister, and Tito lives with his grandmother in an inner-city neighborhood filled with violence, gangs, poverty, and drugs.

These two boys have more than friendship; they have a brotherhood, and the book illustrates how love can cross racial barriers. The story provides a compassionate, fast-paced account of how two boys are drawn into gang violence. The characters are so well portrayed that readers will understand the anguish of Jamal's mother as she sees her older son imprisoned for murder and of Tito's grandmother as she lives through her grandson's tragedy.

Myers does not preach to readers about joining gangs, running drugs, using drugs and alcohol, and carrying guns, but the story is told so well that readers see the dangers for themselves.

About the Author

Walter Dean Myers was born in Martinsburg, West Virginia, August 12, 1937. When he was two years old, his mother died in childbirth. This left his father with eight children to care for, so he arranged for Florence and Herbert Dean of Harlem to take Walter. Living with the Deans meant that he would be well cared for, while Harlem provided him with rich resources of cultural experience and education.

His severe speech handicap caused him frustration, anger, and embarrassment, especially when he was required to read aloud at school. While working through this problem in speech therapy, he began to write what he wanted to say. This was the beginning of his love for writing. After reading the works of the most noted European writers and trying to imitate their style, he read works by black writers Langston Hughes and James Baldwin, which helped him to write about his own culture and experience.

In 1954 he quit high school and joined the army for three years. Later he attended City College of the City University of New York. He has worked as employment supervisor for the New York State Department of Labor and has worked for a transformer company, the post office, and a rehabilitation center. His first writing was for the National Inquirer and adventure magazines, but his career in children's books began when he entered a short story contest run by the Council on Interracial Books for Children and won five hundred dollars. From 1970 to 1977 he worked as an editor for the Bobbs-Merrill Company.

His ideas come from his own experience, from young people around the country, and from news headlines. For example, the death of his brother in Vietnam led to his writing *Fallen Angels*. He sends ideas for books to the publisher and, if approved, he outlines the novel and then begins the writing.

When he goes to schools, he shows students the various stages of his books so that they can see the importance of revision. He says that students have been able to tell him things about himself that he had not realized before.

He and his wife, Connie, have three children—Karen, Michael Dean, and Christopher. Karen is married and has three children, and Dean is in the army.

The Young Landlords, *Motown and Didi*, *Fallen Angels*, and *Now Is Your Time!* have all won Coretta Scott King Awards. *The Young Landlords* and *Now Is Your Time!* were named American Library Association Notable Books.

Now Is Your Time! was included in the ALA "Best" list for 1992. *Scorpions* was selected as a Newbery Honor book (1989).

Plot Summary

Mama is late. Jamal and Sassy fuss at each other as something to do while they worry and wait. Mama has been to the jail to visit her other son, Randy. Randy was involved in a heist, and someone was killed. Randy wants Mama to try and raise five hundred dollars to pay for his appeal. She arrives home tired and distraught because she does not know where she can get that kind of money. The Hicks are poor. The hot water has been turned off and in the small apartment, Jamal must sleep on the sofa so his sister can have the second bedroom. Roaches are in the cereal boxes, and often their only meal is toast. Mama hopes to work extra hours for Mr. Stanton to raise the money. Randy wants Jamal to visit Mack. Mack is a member of the Scorpions and was with Randy when he pulled the heist at the deli. Mama thinks that Jamal must be hanging out with the Scorpions, too. Jamal reassures her that he is not.

School is not a fun place for Jamal, either. He is often late and misses homework, and so he often has to see the principal. The teachers and the principal believe that Jamal is a troublemaker. The class bullies succeed in making it look like Jamal is the instigator. The only time Jamal is happy is when he is drawing. He is thrilled that one of the teachers has asked him to stay after school to paint the set for the seventh grade play. His elation is dashed, however, when he is only asked to open the windows for the paint fumes while everyone else gets to paint. Jamal goes home, fights with Sassy, tries to do his homework and finally leaves to go outside to draw. He knows he is good at that.

Tito comes by, and Jamal asks Tito to go with him to find Mack. Tito does not want to go because Mack will be at the crack house. Yet, he goes because Jamal asks him to go. Mack says that Randy wants Jamal to take over the Scorpions. Mack assures Jamal that he will be behind him, and he gives Jamal a gun. Mack also informs Jamal that the lawyer wants two thousand dollars for the appeal. Where can Jamal get this kind of money? On the way home from school the next day, Jamal stops by the store run by Mr. Gonzalez. Mr. Gonzalez likes Jamal and gives him a job delivering groceries and helping in the store. Jamal likes having a job, but he figures out that it will take a long time to earn enough at the bodega for Randy's appeal.

School proves trouble again when Jamal is bullied into jumping down stairwells. The principal predicts that he will soon expel Jamal. After school, Jamal and Tito go to their favorite place, the boat basin. Here they dream of having their own yachts and sailing away from their troubles. Their dreams give them hope for a better future in a better world.

Back in school, Dwayne, the class bully, harasses Jamal. Dwayne is older and bigger than Jamal, so Jamal knows he cannot win any fight with him. Still, Jamal will not back down. Jamal is badly beaten by Dwayne. Afterwards, he goes home and retrieves Randy's Scorpion jacket from the back closet. He puts it on. He is a Scorpion now.

Jamal, Tito and Mack go to see the Scorpions in their hideout, an old abandoned firehouse. The Scorpions already know that Randy wants Jamal to be the leader. They

do not like this set-up. When the gang becomes threatening, Jamal pulls out the gun. The gang backs off, and Jamal and Tito leave the hideout feeling the power of the gun.

When Jamal gets home, he hides the gun under the sofa cushion. Sassy informs her brother that their father, Jevon, has come by. Jamal knows he is visiting only because he needs money. Jamal's mother left her marriage and took the children because Jevon was abusive. He made Jamal's mother cry just like Randy did. Jamal does not like his father to come by.

Back at school. Dwayne relentlessly continues to bully Jamal. Another fight is set up to take place in the storeroom. Jamal convinces Tito to take the gun and put it in the storeroom before the fight. During their confrontation, Dwayne once again beats Jamal brutally. Jamal reaches for the bag with the gun and shows it to Dwayne. Dwayne cowers. Jamal has the power. He leaves the storeroom and keeps going right out of school. As he is walking home, Jamal begins to think about the repercussions of having a gun in school. What if Dwayne tells? Will he be arrested? Jamal suddenly does not feel so elated.

Jamal knows that if Dwayne had pushed him he would have shot the gun. This scares him. He and Tito know that they need to get rid of the gun, but before they do they want to shoot it. They take the gun to the park, shoot it into the air and run home. The next day, Dwayne threatens to tell the police about the gun. Jamal stands up to him and says that if he does, Dwayne will have to face all of the Scorpions.

Tito agrees to keep the gun at his house, but Abuela, his grandmother, finds it. She tells Tito he has to leave and never come back. Tito is devastated. Jamal knows he has to retrieve the gun and get rid of it. It is too much trouble. Jamal likes his job at Mr. Gonzalez' store. It makes him feel good about himself, but it does not last. Once the Scorpions learn that Jamal is working at the bodega, they start coming in and stealing candy. Mr. Gonzalez does not want their kind in his store, so he fires Jamal. Mr. Gonzalez feels badly and warns Jamal about associating with the gang members.

The talk is all over school that Jamal has a gun. The principal calls Jamal to his office. Jamal denies having a gun. The principal suspends Jamal until his mother can come to see him. The principal wants Jamal to take medicine to calm him down. Mama signs the papers, thinking the pills are just vitamins. Jamal keeps Mama from coming to school by agreeing to get the papers signed and taking the medicine. He does not want to make Mama cry.

Randy gets stabbed in jail. Mama spends a lot of time with him. The need for money to get Randy out of jail becomes more urgent. Jamal feels helpless. He cannot win a fight with Dwayne. He cannot win a fight with the Scorpions. He lost his job and cannot get money for Randy. His only hope is that Sassy will not tell Mama about the gun.

Jamal decides that he does not want to be a Scorpion and wants to give the gun back to Mack. Mack still thinks Jamal should lead the gang. He is afraid that if Indian takes over, he will keep all the money for himself. Mack says that if Jamal takes over the gang, he

can get money for Randy. Jamal says he will think about it. He wants to talk to Indian. He does not return the gun to Mack. Indian agrees to meet Jamal. Tito comes along but hides in the darkness. The meeting does not go well, and Jamal is beaten. Suddenly, shots ring out, and both of the gang members are lying on the ground. Jamal and Tito run and throw the gun into the trash.

Tito has shot the gun in defense of Jamal. Indian came at Jamal with a knife. Now Angel is dead, and Indian is wounded. The next day, Mack claims to be the shooter, but Jamal knows differently. Tito cannot keep the secret. He tells Abuela, and they go to the police. Tito must go back to Puerto Rico or face criminal charges here. Jamal learns to face bullies without a gun. Their friendship is still intact, but they must face separation and an unknown future.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Jamal and his little sister, Sassy, wait for Mama to come home. It is already so late. Sassy asks Jamal if he is worried about Mama. He says "No," but she knows that he is worried because he will not leave his seat at the window. Sassy likes to harass Jamal and tattletale on him. It makes her feel bigger and more important. The evening wears away slowly, as Jamal watches the addicts and winos meander down the street. The TV is on in the background, but Jamal thinks the show is stupid. He plans to buy a VCR when he gets a job, so he can watch better shows.

Finally, around midnight, Mama returns home. She questions Jamal about whether they ate supper. Jamal assures her that they did. He notices how tired Mama looks. Her hair has more gray in it of late since his older brother, Randy, was put in jail. Mama has been to the prison to visit him. Randy only talks of his appeal. It would cost Mama another five hundred dollars to the lawyer. Mama only hopes that by working extra for Mr. Stanton, she can raise the money. Randy was sentenced to fifteen to twenty years with the possibility of parole in seven years. Jamal calculates that he will be nineteen then and Sassy fifteen.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Right from the beginning, Sassy earns her name. She argues and threatens her brother throughout all of their conversations. Mama is gone a lot with work, but more so now that Randy is in prison. Jamal has taken on a more fatherly role, and Sassy resents this. Jamal ignores her. Instead, he imagines how nice it would be to have a VCR so that they would be able to watch movies. When Mama finally arrives home, tired and worn, Jamal stills sees his beautiful mother in spite of the new gray in her hair. Mama moans about the money she needs to pay for an appeal for Randy. Jamal tries to think beyond the sadness of the moment and conjures up a picture in his head of what he and Randy will look like in seven years. The theme of daydreaming is introduced in this chapter. Jamal looks beyond his wretched existence and daydreams of a better life.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Now that Randy is not at home, Jamal is able to let his sister have the small bedroom for herself, and he has taken the pullout bed in the living room. The hot water has been shut off, and taking a cold shower is becoming an everyday occurrence. While eating breakfast, Mama reports to Jamal that Randy wants him to visit Mack. Mack has been in prison, too, but is out now. Mama doesn't understand this request and questions Jamal. She says that Randy wants Mack to tell Jamal whom to look out for in the Scorpions. Mama thinks Jamal has been hanging out with this gang, but he assures her that he has not. Jamal does not like Mack. Mack was with Randy and Willie Pugh when they pulled the stickup. Willie is fourteen. Mack is fifteen, and Randy is seventeen. Mack and Randy were tried as adults. There was a murder. Even though Mack bragged that he did it, nobody believes him because everyone says that Mack is strange.

Chapter 2 Analysis

The poverty of the Hicks family is emphasized in this chapter. Jamal talks about the hot water being turned off and how he has to get used to cold showers. Mama has no eggs for breakfast, so Jamal and Sassy must make do with toast. Mack is introduced as a member of the Scorpion gang along with Randy. Mack is not liked because of his peculiar behavior and his juvenile prison record. Mama is wary of him and does not want Jamal to have anything to do with him, especially since he was involved in the hold up with Randy and claims to have been the trigger for the murder.

The structure of the novel is built on the setting in Harlem. The poverty and drug addicts make up Jamal's world. His poor existence is represented by the lean meals, crowded apartment and gangs. The Scorpions are drug runners. Their namesake stings and kills its victims, like the drugs do to people. The setting is bleak and unforgiving.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Sassy is in third grade, and Jamal is in seventh. Jamal gets sent to the principal's office frequently due to lateness or missed homework. Mr. Davidson blames Jamal's mother for his being late. He thinks that she does not care about her children's education. The teachers all tell Jamal that he can do better in school if he tries. He is tired of hearing what he cannot do from his teachers. Miss Brown is the only teacher Jamal likes, because she is the prettiest in the school. He is excited that she has asked him to stay after school to help paint the set for the seventh grade play. Jamal loves to draw. He wants Mama to buy him real paints this Christmas and not just the watercolors from McCrory's.

Chapter 3 Analysis

In school, Jamal feels unsuccessful and is viewed as a failure by his teachers and principal. The class bully, Dwayne Parsons, belittles him. Dwayne makes fun of Jamal's sneakers and his clothes, since it is obvious that they are from a second hand store. Jamal knows he cannot do anything about his teachers, and he thinks that he cannot do anything about Dwayne because he is small and not tough enough yet. He resigns himself to feeling low. The setting moves to Jamal's school, but his downtrodden existence remains the same. His teachers think little of him, and the bullies, especially Dwayne, crush Jamal physically and emotionally. His resignation to his lot in life is understandable.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Dwayne is hard to ignore, especially when the other students giggle and think he is cool. Jamal gets his mind off Dwayne by thinking about painting the set after school. Finally, the dismissal bell rings, and Miss Brown gives her volunteers their assignments. To Jamal's great disappointment, he is only asked to open all the windows in the gym so that the air can circulate from the painting. Then, he is excused to go home. When he gets home, he fights with Sassy. He tries to do his homework, but math is hard. Mama has gotten paid, so at least he is going to have his favorite supper, spaghetti and meatballs.

After dinner, Jamal goes to the park to draw. He knows he can draw better trees than the others did at school on the scenery. He meets up with his best friend, Tito. Jamal and Tito are close. They wear each other's clothes, do their homework together and share meals. Jamal remembers he must go to see Mack, so he asks Tito to go with him. Tito is afraid, but he goes because Jamal asks him. Jamal knows where to find Mack. He hung out with Randy at the crack house, which is an old boarded-up video game store. They enter from the back. The young teens in the house get crack from here and sell it. This is how Randy made money. Mack is not there, so Jamal and Tito wait outside, leaning on a brand new Mercedes parked out front. A well-dressed man yells at them for leaning on his car. Just as Jamal is looking for something to throw at the car, he spots Mack coming down the street. Jamal knows that Randy pulled the trigger during the stickup with Mack. He is mad at Randy for committing this crime and making his Mama cry.

Chapter 4 Analysis

The one chance for Jamal to shine in school is taken away from him when Miss Brown denies him the opportunity to paint the scenery. He watches the other kids paint. He is not sure if he could do better, but he would have liked the chance to try. Later on at home, he fights with Sassy and struggles with his arithmetic. Mama is able to cook spaghetti and meatballs for dinner, and this saves the evening. Afterwards, Jamal heads outside to draw. There he meets up with his best friend, Tito. The jovial conversation between the two demonstrates their closeness and bond. Their mutual sharing of clothes and teasing of each other emphasizes their love for each other. Because of this bond, Tito reluctantly agrees to go with Jamal to see Mack. Tito is scared, but he will not let Jamal down.

The theme of friendship is introduced in this chapter. The strong bonds between Jamal and Tito are demonstrated. The symbolism in Jamal's love for drawing is also introduced. Jamal has a talent that no one seems to recognize. His teachers certainly

do not. Jamal must pursue this love for drawing on his own. It is the one part of his life he feels successful. It is the one part of his life no one can take from him.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Jamal tells Mack that Randy said to come see him. Mack claims to have heard from Randy's lawyer that it will cost two thousand dollars for his appeal. Jamal remembers Mama saying five hundred dollars. Randy told Mack that maybe the Scorpions can get the money, but the Scorpions cannot operate with Randy now that he is in jail. Randy told Mack that he wants Jamal to take his place in the Scorpions as their leader. If Jamal takes over the Scorpions, he can get the money for Randy's appeal. Jamal is skeptical, but Mack reassures him that as long as he is behind Jamal, the Scorpions will go along. Again, Jamal questions Mack. Jamal is only 12. Mack says he will back Jamal, though, and he has a gun.

On the way home, Jamal thinks that getting a job carrying packages for the A&P would be better than joining the Scorpions to raise the money for Randy. Tito thinks so, too. Jamal tells Mama that the lawyer told Mack it would cost \$2,000 for Randy's appeal. Mama calls the lawyer, and he confirms it but says that he will take \$500 up front. Jamal never wants to see Randy again because Randy made Mama cry.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Mack's proposal to Jamal is tempting. He needs money, but it seems safer to work at the A&P than be a Scorpion. Tito tells Jamal that he should not mess around with a gun. Tito observes, though, that since Randy killed somebody with a gun, maybe the Scorpions will think that Jamal would, too. They might let him be their leader. Jamal thinks about Randy and how he was in trouble with the police before this latest arrest. He made Mama cry then, and she cries a lot now. Jamal does not want to make Mama cry. Jamal does not want Randy to come home again. The gun is introduced in this chapter. It is only speculation why Mack has a gun. Could it be the gun used in the armed robbery?

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Jamal is in the principal's office again. This time, he is caught jumping down the stairwells. Mr. Davidson predicts he will expel Jamal soon. When Jamal returns to class, Dwayne continues his taunts. After school, Jamal asks Tito to go to the boat basin with him. There, the boys dream of someday having enough money to buy one of the beautiful yachts docked there and sailing away to far off places.

Chapter 6 Analysis

School continues to prove not to be a safe haven for Jamal from the rest of the world. The principal threatens expulsion, and Dwayne continues his harassment. Tito and Jamal have discovered the boat basin, where all of the beautiful yachts are anchored. There they are able to dream about another life and another world. Both boys easily fall into the fantasy of sailing away, especially to warmer climates because of Tito's asthma. Jamal cares about Tito and wants him to be somewhere where he will no longer cough. Here at the boat basin, they can support each other and not be in harm's way. It revitalizes their spirits.

The theme of daydreaming is woven into the story with the visit to the boat basin. Jamal and Tito fantasize a great deal there. It is the one place nobody tells them what to do. It is so far removed from Harlem that it offers the boys a window to peer through to a possible other life. The daydreaming offers insights into Jamal and Tito's desires. They are not content with where they are in life, but they dream of something better. This is motivation.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Mama burns her hand on the iron while helping Sassy get ready for school. Jamal and Sassy leave for school, only for Jamal to have to face Dwayne again. Dwayne challenges him to a fight. Dwayne is fourteen and bigger than Jamal, but Jamal knows he cannot back down. After school, they meet up only to have the fight broken up by the mailmen. Jamal is badly beaten. When he gets home, he goes into the back closet and finds Randy's Scorpion jacket.

Dwayne continues to challenge Jamal to another fight. This time, the teacher catches Dwayne throwing a book at Jamal, and he has to stay after school. Jamal waits for Dwayne outside of the school, so no one thinks he is scared of him. Mack comes by and signals to Jamal. Tito joins Jamal, and they both go to see Mack. Jamal tells Tito that he is a Scorpion now. Tito is afraid for Jamal and tells him that he could get into trouble. Jamal offers a spot in the gang to Tito. Tito suggests that maybe the gang could do good things. Jamal tells Tito that if he joins, they can look out for each other. Jamal and Tito tell Mack that they will meet with the rest of the Scorpions. He takes the gun from Mack and puts it in his belt.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Jamal sees no end to the bullying from Dwayne. His only recourse is to join the gang and get support from them. He wants to be tough, and he thinks this will make him tough so that people like Dwayne will leave him alone. Tito knows it means trouble to join a gang, but he is willing to go along with Jamal because he is his best friend and Jamal says they will look out for each other. Best friends trust one another.

Jamal puts on the symbol of the gang - the jacket. It gives him a sense of belonging and power. He is tired of being beaten down, and the Scorpions offer an opportunity to be on top. The gun seals the deal. Jamal has the power to be tough. Tito voices concern. The voice of Tito's fear is to become a thread in the novel.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Jamal and Tito meet the Scorpion gang at the old firehouse behind Marcus Garvey Park. The firehouse is an abandoned building boarded up and locked, but with a window in the back that can be easily reached and opened. When Jamal and Tito enter, they find a cozy set-up with a TV and chairs occupied by Blood, Terry, Indian and Angel - The Scorpions.

By this time, the rest of the Scorpions know that Mack has told Jamal that Randy wants him to take over the gang. They are not happy with this idea. As the arguing gets heated, Jamal opens his coat, and everyone can see the gun. The Scorpions back off. Jamal says if Randy wants him to run the Scorpions, he will. The gang does not like it because he is so young. Jamal says Tito will join, too. Tito is scared but tries not to show it. Jamal knows that the gun is the reason everyone backs down.

When Jamal gets home, he hides the gun under the cushion of the sofa. Sassy walks in and tells Jamal that their father has come by. Jamal's father only shows up when he needs money. Mama took Randy, Jamal and Sassy and left their father because he was abusive. Just like Jamal was glad that Randy is not around anymore, so he is glad his father is not around, too. Each has caused Mama to cry.

Jamal cannot stop thinking about his encounter with the Scorpions. He was afraid, and he knew Tito was, too. The gang was afraid of Mack, who stood behind Jamal, and they were afraid of the gun, too. Jamal is also afraid of the gun. He hopes he does not have to fight any of the Scorpions.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Up until this point, Jamal has never had the upper hand. At school, his teachers accuse him of being trouble. The bullies, especially Dwayne, are unrelenting in their abuse. Jamal has been beaten down emotionally and physically up until now. But suddenly, he is a man of power. He has a gun.

The symbol of the gun as power and the answer to his plight in life takes prominence in this chapter. Jamal faces his enemy, and with the flash of the gun, he rules the day. The power of the gun is overwhelming. The power of the gun deludes Jamal into seeing it as the answer. With the gun, he puts fear in others, instead of his being afraid. It is a feeling that Jamal has never had before. The structure of poverty in the story continues to build with the introduction of Jamal's father, Jevon. Jevon only shows up when he needs money. His attempts at being fatherly are wasted on Jamal. Jamal sees his father for the shallow man that he is.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Jamal's father, Jevon, is coming for dinner. Jamal does not like when his father asks how he is doing in school or whether he is helping Mama. Jevon is never there to help. Why should he ask Jamal? The conversation turns to Randy and how Mama needs money for the appeal. Jevon asks Jamal what he is doing to help Mama get the money. It is not the first time Jevon belittles Jamal. The next day, Jamal hides the gun in his sneaker and takes it to school. Dwayne continues to harass Jamal and sets up another fight in the basement storeroom. Jamal convinces Tito to take the gun and hide it on the shelf in the storeroom before the fight.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Jamal hates the feigned interest Jevon takes in him when he comes home. Jamal knows Jevon is only there for a handout and does not feel that Jevon has the right to talk to him like a father when he is never there for his mother. Jamal also knows that the atmosphere at school will be the same, so he decides to bring his power to school. He brings the gun. When Dwayne sets up another place and time to fight, Jamal convinces Tito to take the gun and hide it so that it will be handy when Jamal fights Dwayne. Tito worries and tells Jamal that he does not want him to kill anyone. Jamal states that he only wants to frighten Dwayne. With that, Tito takes the gun and hides it in the storeroom like Jamal asks. Jamal needs to feel the winner again, and he sees this success coming from the gun.

The theme of bullies pervades the story in Jamal's teachers, Dwayne and even his father. Jamal is belittled and made to feel insignificant by many. Yet, he has success in feeling in charge when he faces down the Scorpions. He can do the same with Dwayne. The voice of Tito's fear threads through, but their friendship is stronger than the fear. Tito does what Jamal asks.

The groundwork for the conflict has been laid. Jamal lives a wretched existence with little hope of escape. His life is exacerbated by the degradation he is put under by his sister, Sassy, his teachers, his father and the school bullies. Suddenly, he feels power over all with the gun. The gun gives him a presence. It gives him a feeling he never had before. It elevates him to a level of respect he never felt before. Yet, there is the nagging voice of Tito, who recognizes the danger of a gun. The conflict of keeping the gun or throwing it away is a choice Jamal needs to make.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

After school, Dwayne and Jamal head for the storeroom. Dwayne wants to fight Jamal outside the storeroom, but Jamal insists that they go in. The rest of the kids say that they will wait outside and listen. Jamal is not afraid of Dwayne even though he knows that Dwayne is bigger and would win the fight. Inside the musty storeroom, Jamal locks the door, and the fight begins. After a few intense blows, Jamal rips Dwayne's shirt, which makes Dwayne even angrier. As Dwayne confronts Jamal, Jamal reaches for the brown bag and pulls out the gun. Dwayne cannot believe it is real. Jamal insists that it is real because the Scorpions do not have fake guns, and he announces to Dwayne that he is the leader of the gang. Even though his heart is pounding, Jamal goes after the cowering Dwayne, winning the fight. Jamal leaves the storeroom and walks out the door of the school.

While walking away from his triumph, he starts to wonder. What will Dwayne say about the gun? Who will he tell? Will Jamal have to leave home? He did not kill anyone. Is he going to jail? Walking and trying to decide what to do, Jamal hears his name. It is Tito.

Chapter 10 Analysis

In spite of his triumph and win over Dwayne, Jamal is devastated. He pushes passed everyone, leaves school and unconsciously heads for the boat basin. What has he done? What does it mean? His mind is racing, but he has no answers. It is not right to have a gun, but people do not mess with you when you have one. Indian backed off. Dwayne backed off. Jamal is now unsure of this kind of power.

The confidence Jamal had going into the fight with Dwayne has now disappeared. The reality of the significance of the gun is all too clear. Jamal brought the gun to school. The internal conflict of what the gun has brought to Jamal and now where the gun has potentially taken him well up inside of him as he wanders.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Tito reports to Jamal that Dwayne was very scared when Jamal left. Everybody is surprised at how tough Jamal is and that he is a member of the Scorpions. Jamal confesses to Tito that if Dwayne had pushed him, he would have fired the gun. Tito turns away from Jamal. He does not want to hear this.

Tito and Jamal know that they need to get rid of the gun, but do they throw it away or give it back to Mack? They decide that they want to shoot it off once before they do. They go to the edge of the park, and Tito fires the gun. Afterwards, they put the gun back into the bag and run home.

At home, Jamal worries about what Dwayne will say about the gun. He cannot sleep. He keeps replaying the memory of when the police came to the house to arrest Randy. Randy ran, but the police caught him anyway. The next morning, the poor conditions under which they live are evident again when a roach crawls out of the cereal box. Mama reminds Jamal to see Mr. Gonzalez about a job at his grocery store. Jamal promises to go.

At school, Jamal is all the talk. Everyone wants to know about the gun and when he will fight Dwayne again. Tito chimes in that if Jamal has to fight again, he will fight with him. Dwayne threatens to tell the police that Jamal has a gun. Jamal stands up to him and says that if he does, Dwayne will have to face all of the Scorpions. After school, Jamal sees Mr. Gonzalez and gets the job at the bodega.

Chapter 11 Analysis

The gun has lost its charm. Jamal realizes that if pushed, he might have shot Dwayne. He is frightened. The external conflicts provided by all those who put Jamal down are fading in light of his internal conflict about possessing a gun. His thought of running away is overshadowed by the memory of his brother Randy's attempt to run from the police at the time of his arrest. Yet, when Dwayne threatens to call the police, Jamal stands up to him without the gun. The power he achieved with the gun surfaces without it. He uses the Scorpions for support, but does he have it?

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Mr. Gonzalez tells Jamal that he will pay him fifteen dollars for three hours of work. Plus, Jamal will get tips from the customers he helps with their bags. Immediately, Jamal starts to calculate how long he will have to work to earn two thousand dollars to help Randy. He starts to think, too, where else he could spend that amount of money. He thinks about a car. By the time he has that much money, he will be old enough to drive. He will be in the driver's seat.

Carrying groceries is hard work, especially when it involves carrying them up flights of stairs. Some of the customers are nice, and others are not so generous with their tips. After the deliveries are made, Jamal is back at the store. Blood comes in. He buys some cigarettes and tells Jamal that he will tell Indian that Jamal is working there.

On Sunday after church, Jamal sees Tito coming down the street. He meets him before Tito comes into the house. Tito is troubled. His grandmother has found the gun he was hiding in their house. She tells Tito to leave and never come back. Tito is visibly upset, and Mama tries to find out why. Tito will not say, but he does agree to eat supper with them. Jamal walks Tito home. Tito then tells Jamal that he told his grandmother, Abuela, that it was he who found the gun. The boys decide that the gun is too much trouble and sneak back into Tito's house so that Jamal can retrieve the gun and get rid of it.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Jamal likes having a job. It makes him feel good about himself. For the first time, he has a sense of value. Even though he realizes how long it will take to earn enough money for Randy's appeal, he is helping. Yet, he cannot help dreaming about the possibilities of what two thousand dollars could buy for him. The theme of daydreaming continues to prove itself an outlet for Jamal.

This good feeling does not last long. When Tito tells Jamal that he has been thrown out of the house because of the gun, it becomes obvious that they have to get rid of it. The gun is becoming too much trouble. Jamal knows what he must do; yet he knows he will not. The conflict within Jamal over getting rid of the gun or keeping it is becoming the forefront of the story. Jamal hears Tito's warnings of its danger, but his need for the power it wields is stronger.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Jamal could not answer any questions on the Social Studies test. He thinks this is why his teacher, Mr. Hunter, is sending him to the principal's office. After waiting while Mr. Davidson riffles through some papers, Dwayne comes into the office with his mother. Dwayne's mother asks him to repeat the story he told her to Mr. Davidson. Dwayne accuses Jamal of starting the fight last week and starting it again yesterday. He accuses Jamal of aiming a gun at him. Jamal denies having a gun and says that Dwayne is the one who is starting the fights and that Dwayne is just mad because Jamal tore his shirt. Dwayne's mother, Mrs. Parsons, wants the police brought in, but Mr. Davidson says he cannot accuse Jamal of having a gun based on one boy's accusation.

When Dwayne and his mother leave, Mr. Davidson tells Jamal that his mother must come to school to see him. Jamal tries to explain that his mother works and cannot come to school. Mr. Davidson will not let Jamal go back to class until the matter is resolved, so he sends him to the cafeteria. Jamal asks why Mr. Davidson wants to see his mother. Mr. Davidson wants Jamal's mother to take him out of school because he is a troublemaker. Jamal leaves the principal's office. He does not, however, go to the cafeteria, but instead he leaves the building. When Jamal arrives home, his sister, Sassy tells him the school has called because he walked out. Jamal asks her not to tell Mama. Jamal goes to Tito's house and finds that Abuela is distraught over the gun. She asks Jamal if Tito is a good boy. He assures her that Tito is.

When Jamal returns to Mr. Gonzalez' store, Indian and Angel are waiting for him. Mr. Gonzalez is not happy to see them because he knows they are trouble. Indian informs Jamal that if he is going to be the leader of the Scorpions he needs to tell the man with the Mercedes. Jamal cannot talk now, so Indian and Angel leave after pocketing some candy. Mr. Gonzalez tells Jamal he has to leave, too, and with it his job is gone. Mr. Gonzalez pays Jamal for the work he had done and warns him to stay away from Indian and Angel.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Jamal is able to buy time at school by lying about the gun. It is his word against Dwayne's. Mr. Davidson uses this opportunity to inform Jamal that he is planning on asking his mother to take him out of school. Mr. Davidson and Jamal's teachers seem blind to the bullying that is going on in the school. Jamal finds the school atmosphere unfriendly and unsupportive. His decisions to leave school on many occasions seem to be his way of expelling himself from unsympathetic people. Ironically, these decisions may lead to the school expelling him.

The gun has caused physical distress to Abuela. She needs to be reassured by Jamal that Tito is a good person, for in her mind anyone with a gun is bad. The irony is that Tito is such a good person and friend to Jamal that Tito lies about the gun to help Jamal. Jamal knows this and can honestly tell Abuela that Tito is good.

Indian and Angel take Jamal's job away. Their presence in the store scares Mr. Gonzalez. He does not want them around, and if the reason they are there is Jamal, then Jamal must leave. The power Jamal once felt is slowly slipping away. The gun is too much trouble. Jamal enjoyed the feeling of power as a member of the Scorpions and owner of a gun, but ironically, this same association has lost him his job. Jamal's internal conflict between his association with the Scorpions and returning to who he was before he put on the Scorpion jacket has caused him to lose his job.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Jamal knows when he gets home that something is wrong. Sassy is sitting in the dark and tells Jamal that Randy has been stabbed while in jail. He is in the hospital. Mama has gone to be with him. Jamal feels helpless and at odds with himself. He lost his job because of his association with the Scorpions, which means he cannot get money for Randy or Mama. He cannot fight Dwayne and win without the gun. He cannot fight Indian and win without the gun.

Sassy has heard about the gun at school and asks Jamal about it. At first, he denies having it, but when Sassy says she is going to look for it, he knows he must tell. He lies and says that the gun is at Tito's house. Sassy and Jamal argue about whether to tell Mama about the gun. Just as Jamal takes the gun out from under the sofa cushion to get rid of it, Mama comes through the door. She reports that Randy is badly cut up, and she sobs openly. A sudden knock at the door reveals Reverend Biggs, who has come to the house on Mama's request to pray for Randy. After the Reverend leaves, Mama and Sassy go to bed. Sassy tells Jamal that she will not tell Mama about the gun.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Jamal's world is crashing in on him. He cannot stop Dwayne. He cannot stop Indian. He cannot help Mama or Randy with money. Sassy is afraid Jamal will get into trouble like Randy. The only thing he has power over is keeping Sassy from telling Mama about the gun. He does not want to make her cry like his father and brother did. He begs Sassy not to tell. It is his only consolation when she agrees. The internal conflict Jamal is feeling is building to a climax. Somehow he must resolve whether to leave the Scorpions and whether to get rid of the gun. Jamal's mother is in anguish over Randy. Jamal cannot disappoint her, too.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

The next day Jamal tells Tito he is going to give the gun back to Mack and tell him he does not want to be in the Scorpions. He says that Tito does not have to come with him, but Jamal knows Tito will always be with him. Jamal and Tito go to the crack house looking for Mack. They are told he is in the park. Among the winos and crack heads lying in the park, Jamal and Tito find Mack. Mack tells them that Indian wants to take over the Scorpions. Others who want in on the crack money are invading their territory. Indian wants to fight them. Mack is too old to get into the fight because if caught he would be tried as an adult.

Mack wants Jamal to fight and keep the territory because he knows if Indian takes over, he will keep the money. Mack says that if Jamal gets the money he can help Randy. Jamal says he has to think about it. He says he wants to talk to Indian. Tito chimes in that if Jamal tells Indian that Randy says Indian should take over the Scorpions until he gets out, Indian will listen and give Randy money for his appeal. Jamal knows this is a great idea and a way to help Randy. While waiting to meet up with Indian, Jamal treats Tito to pizza and soda and buys a drawing tablet. He decides to draw a picture of Tito because he knows that Tito would like that.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Jamal's dilemma is whether to turn the Scorpions over to Indian or not. Mack believes that if Indian is the leader, he will keep all the profits for himself and not try to use some of the money to help Randy with his appeal. Jamal does not want to be the leader of the Scorpions, but he will, if it means getting money for Randy. Tito's idea of telling Indian that Randy wants Indian to be leader will ensure that the money they get will be used for his appeal. Jamal likes this idea. It seems like a good solution. The gun is still an issue. Tito wants Jamal to get rid of it. Jamal wants to hold onto it, in case he needs it to scare someone. The power he feels when he uses it is very strong.

Jamal's resolve to quit the Scorpions and get rid of the gun is soon overshadowed by his desire to help his brother Randy. If helping the Scorpions will get money for the appeal, then he is willing to consider it. Tito, again, proves the voice of reason. He concocts the story that Indian should take over the Scorpions because that is what Randy wants. This will make Indian indebted to Randy, and he will have to help with the money for the appeal. Jamal quickly recognizes this as a way to help Randy and separate himself from the gang.

Tito, who is always there for Jamal, develops the theme of friendship. He never abandons him or criticizes him, but instead, finds ways to help even if it means lying for him. Jamal responds to the bond between them by spending some of his pay on Tito and

buying a tablet of paper so he can draw Tito's picture. This is Jamal's way of giving back to Tito for his stalwart friendship.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Mr. Davidson has sent a letter to Mrs. Hicks asking her to come to school. He does not mention the gun in the letter. Jamal is home from school because he is not allowed to return. He calls the school and tells them that his mother is at the hospital with Randy and cannot come to school. Mr. Davidson tells Jamal to come back to school the next day.

The next phone call Jamal makes is to Griff's Bar-B-Que, where Indian hangs out. When he calls, Angel answers to phone. Jamal tells Angel that Randy told his mother that Indian should take over the Scorpions and get the money for his appeal. After Angel reports to Indian, he tells Jamal that he needs to say this in front of all of the Scorpions. Jamal is to meet them the next night at eleven o'clock in the park.

At school, Mr. Davidson meets Jamal in the nurse's office. He gives Jamal a form to take home to his mother for her signature. It is a recommendation that Jamal take medicine to help him be calmer in school. Some of the kids at school are pushing Dwayne to confront Jamal again. Jamal reminds Dwayne that he should follow his mother's advice and leave him alone. Jamal reminds Dwayne that he has the backing of the Scorpions. Dwayne walks away. In the meantime, Mama knows she has to get Randy out of jail, but she needs money for the appeal. She asks her boss, Mr. Stanton, for a loan, but he turns her down.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Jamal is still bolstered by his association with the Scorpions. He knows he may have to fight Indian, but he is prepared to do that. He feels the power of the gang behind him when he is confronted by Dwayne again. Mama has learned a hard lesson. When Mr. Stanton turns down her loan, she realizes that her problems belong only to her. She has to resolve them herself. Jamal has learned that hard lesson himself in his struggle with Dwayne. He has to deal with him himself. Yet, it does not mean that he is alone. Mama hugs Jamal and Sassy after Mr. Stanton turns her down. Jamal has Tito always at his side. The atmosphere is tense leading to the climax. Jamal knows that he must get out of the gang, but he must do it by facing Indian.

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

This is the night Jamal is to meet Indian in the park. He waits for Tito, but Tito is not coming. Jamal is going to be late, so he leaves and heads for the park. As he is walking away, he hears Tito calling him. Tito has been waiting for Abuela to go to bed before leaving the apartment. Jamal does not want Indian to think he is not going to show, so they both hurry along. As Jamal and Tito walk toward the park, they plan their strategy. Jamal tells Tito to hold the gun so that if the meeting goes well, Tito can give it to Indian. Jamal tells Tito to stay back in the dark so that Indian does not see him. As Jamal walks toward the swing set where he is to meet Indian, he is scared.

Indian tells Jamal that he is the leader of the Scorpions and only he can decide if Jamal can give them up. As Indian approaches Jamal, Angel moves in next to him. Indian and Angel hit Jamal with one blow after the other. Suddenly, there are three shots fired. Jamal looks up to see Tito. Angel is lying face down on the ground. Indian is crawling away. Tito and Jamal run.

Chapter 17 Analysis

Jamal is scared. He knows this meeting with Indian could be dangerous. He wonders if there will ever be a time when he does not have to worry if someone is going to beat him up. Jamal hopes the meeting will go well, but it soon becomes obvious when Angel moves in and Indian takes the first swing that Jamal will get hurt. His best friend cannot let this happen. Tito fires the gun. The climax resounds with three shots. The power of the gun has spoken.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

As soon as Jamal and Tito are away from the park, Jamal says that Tito saved his life because Angel was going to stab him. Tito is crying. They immediately decide to throw the gun away. When they see a dumpster, Jamal tosses the gun in with the garbage. They arrive at Tito's house, and he asks Jamal to come in with him. After seeing him to bed, Jamal goes home. As he runs, he is picturing Blood and the others waiting for him there.

At school, the nurse starts Jamal on the medicine. It makes him feel sleepy. Tito arrives late for school with the newspaper, but there is nothing reported about their rumble. Tito wants to go to Jamal's house, but Jamal says, "No." He fears that the Scorpions will come looking for him there, and he does not want Tito to get hurt.

Chapter 18 Analysis

Two friends are at crossroads. Tito has killed someone in defense of his friend, and Jamal must protect Tito from retaliation from the gang by keeping him away from his house. Tito is distraught over his actions. Jamal is scared. The ultimate power of the gun has been used, and it has and will cost dearly. One person is dead, and the others do not yet know their fate.

Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Instead of visiting Randy, Mama decides to go to church. She takes Jamal and Sassy with her. As they leave, Mack is waiting for Jamal on the stoop. He asks Mama if he can speak to Jamal, and Mama says Jamal needs to be in church in five minutes. Mack recounts a different tale than what Jamal knows happened the night before. Mack says that Indian and Angel were pushing Mack out of the Scorpions, so last night he went to the park and shot both of them. He killed Angel and severely wounded Indian. Now he is the leader of the Scorpions. Randy is in jail, and Angel and Indian are out. The man with the money will need Mack to do his running. Mama comes back looking for Jamal. He tells her that Mack will lead the Scorpions and that he is sure Randy would want it that way.

Chapter 19 Analysis

Mack has become the ultimate buffoon. His drug and alcohol addictions have given him grand illusions. In the heist with Randy, he claims to have been the shooter. The police soon learn the truth, releasing Mack from jail. Now with this latest shooting, Mack claims once again to have been the perpetrator, deluding himself with his force and power. Then again, is he the buffoon? Is Mack telling these tales in the hope of helping someone else? Tito and Jamal are just children. They should not be shooting guns. Does Mack hope by confessing that he did it, to remove the guilt and suspicion from them?

The theme of friendship rises again here. Mack has been a staunch friend to Randy all throughout the story. He enters the scene by wanting to help Jamal take over the Scorpions because Jamal is Randy's brother. He gives him a gun to give him the power to be the leader. When Jamal wants to give up the leadership, Mack doesn't want him to because keeping control is the only way to help Randy. Now that things have gone wrong and Angel is dead, Mack tries to take the blame away from Jamal. His friendship with Randy is what motivates him. The power of friendship between Jamal and Tito is underscored by the power of friendship between Randy and Mack.

Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

The Scorpions wear their colors to Angel's funeral. Jamal is worried about Tito. He will not come out of his house. When Jamal visits, he tells Tito that Mack is claiming to have shot Angel and Indian. Tito says he did not want to kill anyone. After this visit, Abuela will not let Jamal visit Tito again. Tito stops going to school. Jamal cannot find out how he is. At school, Mr. Davidson tells Jamal that he is transferring him to a school for problem kids. Jamal does not care. He has lost his best friend.

Finally, after Jamal waits for days on Tito's stoop, Tito comes out and talks to Jamal. Tito says that he had to tell the whole story to Abuela. She called the police, who took Tito in for questioning. Tito told the police that Indian and Angel jumped him and that he had found the gun and was alone. The police charged him as a juvenile delinquent and said he should go back to Puerto Rico with his father so he would not get into trouble here. He is packed and leaving immediately.

Jamal gets the drawing of Tito that he had been working on. He hands it to Tito. Tito says he does not look like the picture anymore, so he gives it back. Tito and Abuela get into the cab, and it pulls away. As Jamal walks home, he hears his name. Tito is calling him. The cab comes back, and Tito jumps out. He gives Jamal a hug, takes the picture and jumps back into the cab. Jamal has his friend back.

Chapter 20 Analysis

Many lives are ruined by the power of the gun. The bite of the poisonous scorpion has affected many. Jamal will be transferred to a school for children with discipline problems and be without his best friend. Tito may never recover from the horror of murdering someone, even though it was in defense of his friend. Angel is dead. Indian is wounded, and Mack remains in his drug-induced stupors. Mama continues to suffer from the ills of her son, Randy, compounded by her uneasiness over Jamal and his fate. Abuela is forced to return to Puerto Rico with Tito for an uncertain life. Violence, hatred and drugs all sting like a scorpion and leave the victims dead by their poison. Still, the novel ends on a positive note with the drawing. Jamal's picture of Tito will be the bond that maintains their friendship over the miles.

Characters

Jamal Hicks

Jamal is the protagonist. He is a young black boy of twelve who lives in a very poor area of the city with his mother and sister. His father has abandoned his family and only shows up when he needs money. His elder brother, Randy, is in jail. His sister is younger than he is. Jamal's relationship with his sister is often contentious because she enjoys telling on him to their mother. Jamal's relationship with his mother is very loving. He worries about her. He hates the fact that his brother and father have made his mother sad and have done things over the years to make her cry. He is very sensitive to her and is aware of her deep love and commitment to her children.

Jamal easily gets drawn into situations that prove to be harmful. At school, the classroom bully, Dwayne Parsons, continually challenges Jamal to a fight. Jamal feels he has no recourse but to fight him. Jamal gets drawn into the gang his brother was in before he was put into jail. His best friend, Tito Cruz, warns him not to join.

Jamal is a dreamer. He fantasizes about a better life for himself and his family, especially when he goes to the boat basin. There he dreams of owning a large yacht and sailing away from all of the poverty and drugs he sees every day. He holds onto these dreams as best as he can.

Jamal is bullied and learns the hard way that a gun is will not solve his woes. His internal conflict drives the story. His poor existence leaves him helpless to life's struggles, and his momentary elation over the power that a weapon can give is mistaken for the answer to his problems.

Tito Cruz

Tito is also a protagonist. He is a young Puerto Rican boy who is Jamal's best friend. He lives with his grandmother, Abuela. His father also has left the family and gone back to Puerto Rico. Tito tries to be the voice of reason and common sense for Jamal. He is not very successful. As any good friend, Tito follows Jamal to be there for him and keep him out of harm's way. Tito's sensitivity to right and wrong and his ability to foresee possible dangers reflect a child well beyond his actual years. His love for Jamal and his sacrifice for his friend elevate him to hero status.

Mrs. Hicks (Mama)

Mama Hicks has a son in jail. She spends her days traveling to the prison to see him, and when he is stabbed, she spends hours by his side. She needs money. The appeal for her son to get another trial is expensive. The fact the Randy is stabbed in jail only makes her realize how imperative it is to get him out. She is a deeply religious woman



who calls on her minister to help her pray when her son is stabbed. She takes Jamal and Sassy to church every Sunday. In her humble way, she strives to give the children an understanding of right and wrong. She works long and hard at her job and encourages Jamal to get a job and develop responsibilities for the house as well. She loves Tito and treats him as another son.

Sassy Hicks

Sassy is Jamal's baby sister. She is eight. Since Mama Hicks is so consumed with her son, Randy, who is in jail, Sassy uses the weapon of tattling on Jamal to get attention. Sassy has the second bedroom in the two-bedroom apartment. Jamal sleeps on the sofa, but his clothes are in Sassy's room. He must tolerate her prickly behavior, and he often ends up in a verbal dueling match with her. However, when Jamal really needs her to keep a secret, she does as he asks, exposing her love for her brother in spite of her usual "sassy" remarks.

Randy Hicks

Randy is seventeen and Jamal's older brother. He is in prison for robbery and murder. He has never led a good life, and it does not surprise anyone that he is in jail. Randy has enemies who get the other prisoners to stab him. Randy refuses to name his attackers for fear they will try again. He is stabbed so many times that he almost dies. Mama and Jamal know that they must get the two thousand dollars somehow to get Randy out of jail for his safety. After he is able to leave the prison hospital, the judge moves him to a different prison away from the people who stabbed him.

Jevon Hicks

Jevon is Jamal's father, who only shows up when he needs money. When he is around, he attempts to play the father to Jamal, but Jamal resents this.

Dwayne Parsons

Dwayne is the class bully. He continually taunts Jamal. He is successful in making people think that Jamal is the bully. Jamal fights Dwayne because he does not see any other way to deal with him. When Jamal shows Dwayne the gun, however, Dwayne backs off. When finally confronted, bullies will stop. Even though the other kids urge him to fight Jamal again, Dwayne chooses not to fight after Jamal threatens him with the gun.



Mack

Mack is fifteen and already has a criminal record. He was Randy's backup in the gang, so now that Randy is in jail, Mack tries to convince Jamal that he should take over as the leader. Mack is an alcoholic and a drug user, and his slurred speech makes people think he is strange. The other gang members dismiss him as useless. In spite of his wasteful existence, Mack proves to be of stronger character than he would be given credit for. He tries to take the wrap for Angel's murder and save Tito. His valiant gesture is wasted when Tito confesses, but Mack is elevated in Jamal's eyes as worthy of being a friend. Jamal encourages Mack to take over the Scorpions and be their leader. He tells Mack that Randy would want it.

Scorpions

The Scorpions is the name of the gang to which Randy, Indian, Blood, Terry, Angel and Mack belong. The members are all under the age of 18 so that if caught they will not be tried as adults. Their function as a gang is to be drug runners. Mack is 15, and he is kicked out of the gang when Randy is arrested. Mack is Randy's friend and backup. He is also a user, and this causes the other members not to trust him.

Indian

Indian is a strong second in command of the Scorpions, who takes over after Randy's arrest.

Blood

Blood is a member of the Scorpions.

Angel

Angel is a member of the Scorpions who is killed by Tito.

Abuela

Abuela is Tito's grandmother. Tito lives with her.

Mr. Gonzalez

Mr. Gonzalez owns the grocery store where Jamal works for a time. He is very fond of Jamal and is sorry to have to let him go from his job, but Mr. Gonzalez is afraid of the Scorpions who come to the store to see Jamal.

Mr. Davidson

Mr. Davidson is the principal of the school Jamal attends. He is insensitive to Jamal and believes that Jamal is a bully who disrupts classes. He recommends putting Jamal on drugs to curb his behavior and then decides that he wants to transfer Jamal to a school for children with behavior problems.

Mr. Stanton

Mr. Stanton is the man for whom Mama works. She has borrowed a small amount of money from him in the past, so she goes to him to borrow the two thousand dollars to pay for Randy's appeal. Mr. Stanton turns her down.

Objects/Places

The Gun

The gun is the primary motivator in the story. It is never established how Mack has a gun to give Jamal. Mack gives the gun to Jamal when he is trying to convince Jamal to take over the leadership of the Scorpions. Tito is afraid of the gun and voices his fear from the beginning. His concerns foreshadow the sad consequences of his actions. It seems unlikely from the beginning that Tito would be the one to use the gun, but his friendship for Jamal spurs him to use it to defend him. The gun hangs ominously over the boys from the minute they take possession of it. They hide it from the adults in their lives because they know it is wrong to have a gun. They are unsure as to how to make use of the gun, except that Jamal is keen enough to realize its potential as a threatening tool against Dwayne and Indian. The power of the gun to be more than just a threat is brought home when Angel is killed with it. Jamal finally rids himself of the gun in a garbage dumpster. The full consequence of the power of the gun does not materialize until Tito must return to Puerto Rico or face criminal charges here.

Marcus Garvey Park

Jamal meets Indian for their final confrontation in Marcus Garvey Park. Angel is Indian's backup, and Tito is Jamal's backup. When Angel and Indian gang up on Jamal, Tito shoots the gun, killing Angel and wounding Indian.

Bodega

The bodega is the grocery store owned by Mr. Gonzalez.

Boat Basin

Jamal and Tito like to walk to where the boats are docked and daydream about owning their own boats. It is a place of refuge from the squalor, poverty and degradation of their neighborhoods. Here they can remove themselves from the harsh realities of their lives and transport themselves to another world where life appears to be wonderful and nonthreatening.

Old Firehouse

The old abandoned firehouse has become the headquarters of the Scorpions. Tito imagines being a fireman. "I could be a fireman. I could save people."



Harlem

Harlem is the area of the city where the story takes place.

Storeroom

The storeroom is the area of the school where Dwayne and Jamal have their second fight and where Jamal shows Dwayne the gun.

Drawing Tablet

Jamal likes to draw. When he gets paid from his job at the bodega, he buys a drawing tablet with some of the money. He sketches a picture of Tito, which he gives to him at the end of the story.

Crack House

The crack house is an old video store where Mack hangs out and where Randy used to make money.

Scorpion Jacket

Randy is a member of the Scorpions. While he is in jail, Jamal takes his jacket with the scorpion logo on the back and puts it on, declaring that he is a Scorpion.

Setting

The story is set in Harlem in the midst of drug runners and winos.

Much of the action takes place in the family apartment—the place where Jamal's older brother Randy was arrested by the police, where the family lives with the barest necessities, where Sassy and Jamal bicker, and where their father comes on rare occasions and lowers Jamal's self esteem. In contrast, the apartment where Tito and his grandmother live is a safe haven, a place of warmth, love, and good food.

Jamal has to deal with a bully every day at school where the teachers are insensitive, arrogant, and derogatory.

The storeroom of the school is the scene of Jamal's confrontation with Dwayne. It is here that Jamal realizes the power of the gun to equalize the odds.

Part of the conflict takes place in a crack house where the Scorpions vie for leadership of the gang, and Jamal takes over because of the gun in his belt. There is also a park where drug addicts and winos lie around. High on drugs, Indian and Angel try to kill Jamal with a switchblade there, and Tito's life is changed forever when he shoots two of the Scorpions.

The place of dreams for the future is the boat dock. The boys go there to admire the yachts and to think of growing up, owning, racing, and sailing them to Puerto Rico. It is a place to get away from the problems of their own neighborhood and a place to think.

Social Sensitivity

This book deals with societal problems—broken families, crimes committed with guns, the legal system, the drug trade, "crackheads," poverty, selfimage, the school system, and peer pressure. Each is handled with sensitivity and without preaching. Yet the characters and events are treated in such a way that young people can see for themselves the dangers.

Literary Qualities

The action and development of character are mostly achieved through what people say and how they say it. Dialogue is all in what is commonly called black or variant English with some street words, but there is not much profanity considering the kind of people Indian, Angel, and Mack are. A few off-color words are used in order to make the book realistic.

There is sometimes "jive talk," such as: ". . . he came loudmouthing me in front of everybody;" "I got the heat karate can't beat. Miss three five seven and a ticket to heaven;" "So what you soupin' up to him for?;" "Girl, if I take my shoe off, you going to wish you had your hind parts in your room!;" "I ain't gonna punk out." Whenever Myers uses idioms that might not be easily understood, he gives enough other information so that readers will understand the phrases. For instance, when Mack brags about having done the shooting, somebody "dropped a dime on him," and the police pick him up.

Readers know what happened, but they may not know that the saying comes from the time when it cost a dime to use a pay phone to call and turn him in. When the wino says that he could really hoop, he means that he used to be a good basketball player.

There is some poetic language and symbolism in the book. For instance, there are pigeons on the window ledge and more across the street "their gray bodies looking like stones on the edge of the roof." Other examples are: Jamal's words "had lain in the bottom of his stomach like rocks weighing his whole life down;" "It was almost a memory before it happened."

One example of symbolism is that when Mack makes Jamal confront the other Scorpions in the crackhouse, he sees some pigeons eating a muffin. A sparrow tries to get some of the muffin, but the pigeons peck him and run him out.

Myers does not tell readers what the economic status of the family is, but here and there he puts in little details that make it clear. The apartment is so small that there is no privacy. Jamal has to turn his head when his mother takes off her stockings. The shower is cold because there has been no hot water for two days. There are no eggs.

He counts the pieces of toast so that he knows he has already eaten his share.

Instead of another piece of toast, he gets a drink of water.

Themes

Friendship

Jamal and Tito's relationship exemplifies what it means to be a friend and to enjoy the benefits of having a friend. Born into different ethnic backgrounds, they look beyond color and race to see each other as real people who love and respect one another. Neither boy has a father present in his life. This is important, as they are faced with difficult issues due to their circumstances. Fathers could have guided their sons to shun disreputable gang members, and perhaps Jamal's father could have kept Randy from a life of crime. Without male role models, the boys are left to be the men of the house. In trying to resolve complicated issues, they make poor choices, but they have each other. Tito proves to be the voice of conscience and tries to steer Jamal away from the Scorpions. However, as a true friend, he will not abandon Jamal and makes the ultimate choice to help Jamal against Indian and Angel, even though the solution is so repugnant to him. Jamal, in turn, wants to keep Tito out of harm's way by refusing to let him come to his house after the shooting because the Scorpions may come looking for him in revenge. The separation of the two best friends at the end of the book does not dissolve their friendship. Tito, by returning to take the picture that Jamal has drawn of him, solidifies the continuance of their friendship over the miles.

Choices

People live by their choices. Randy chooses a life of crime and almost pays with his life. Jamal and Tito make poor choices about their relationship with the Scorpions and keeping the gun. Jamal attempts to make good choices when he works for Mr. Gonzalez. His loss of the job is not only due to Angel and Indian, but also due to his choice of being associated with the Scorpions. Tito struggles with choices. He tries to make good ones and steer Jamal away from danger, but in making the right choice of defending Jamal, he also makes the bad choice of using the gun in that defense.

Jamal also struggles with choices. He is elevated by the power of the gun as a deterrent to bullies, but he chooses to ignore the potential dangers it brings with it. Ultimately, Tito makes the right choice, tells Abuela what has happened and accepts the consequences. He takes solace in his continued friendship with Jamal. By making this final good choice, Tito demonstrates his heroic qualities.

Daydreaming

Daydreaming can be prompted by many things, but in the case of Jamal and Tito, poverty is their inspiration. Daydreaming can be a motivator, too. Jamal imagines a VCR, on which he can watch movies. He dreams of driving his own car. He and Tito walk for blocks to get to the boat basin so they can dream of their own yachts. The poverty that Jamal and Tito experience leads them to want a better life. Their reality is

such that they may never get out of the ghetto, but their dreams can transport them to places outside of themselves at least for a while. Shared dreams, too, make them seem more real. Jamal and Tito share their imaginings, and this gives them the hope that someday maybe they can be real.

Power, Helplessness and Violence

Jamal is a victim of bullying. He is young, and when the older bigger boys at school, especially Dwayne, pick on him, he feels helpless. He fights Dwayne, knowing full well that he will be beaten. He sees no way out. Suddenly, he has a gun. The Scorpion, Indian, backs down when he sees the gun, and Dwayne backs away when he sees the gun. The gun gives Jamal power over the bullies. Jamal likes the security it gives to him. He knows he should throw the gun away, but he is resistant.

When Angel and Indian bully Jamal into relinquishing the leadership of the Scorpions at the playground, Tito takes the power of the gun to its fullest extent and uses it. He does not mean to kill, only scare, but he goes too far. He realizes only too vividly that the power of the gun is deadly. Jamal throws the gun away. Does this mean that he has thrown away his power over the bullies? In the last paragraph of the book, Jamal is looked over by another big kid. This time Jamal leers back. The potential bully moves on. Jamal has stood up for himself against a bully without the help of the gun.

Themes/Characters

A major theme is friendship and loyalty, but the book also deals with making decisions. Gangs, guns, drugs, drug running, and violence are shown in such a way that readers see that they are decisions that lead only to tragedy.

Jamal's family consists of an absentee father whose occasional visits result in demands and threats against him, a religious, hard-working mother who is consumed with grief over her son's involvement in robbery and murder, and Randy who was the leader of the Scorpions until his implication in the murder. He is stabbed and almost killed in prison. Sassy, Jamal's younger sister, picks at him, argues, and tries to get him in trouble, but she shows how much she cares for him as life becomes more desperate.

Tito wears Jamal's clothes because it makes him feel closer to Jamal, his friend. He asks Jamal not to fight the bully, not to join the Scorpions, and not to keep the gun. They can talk together about anything, and Tito would do anything for Jamal. Eventually he ruins his own life in order to save his friend.

Mack, a wino, is mentally deficient.

He cannot take over the Scorpions himself because of his age and condition, but he gives Jamal the gun and pushes him to assume the leadership of the gang even though he is only twelve and not even a member. Indian and Angel are drug runners and users who are bigger, older, and very dangerous.

As Jamal goes from one danger to the next, his father nags at him to be strong and act more like a man. Even though Jamal uses a gun to face down the tough older Scorpions, he is very frightened.

He wonders whether there will ever be a time when he will not have to worry about being beaten up. The author's compassion for the characters is evident throughout. After the shooting, Tito is never the same and he becomes physically ill. "It was as if he had been wounded in a place that Jamal couldn't see, although he knew the wound was there." Mama thinks back to the time when Randy was a baby and a white woman came up and smiled at him "that was the best feeling in the world.

You got a baby and you hope so much for it." Jamal hopes that his brother never gets out of prison and comes home because he is always making his mother cry. He does not want either his brother or his father back because they both cause his mama so much sadness. "They were both gone and each of them had taken a little piece of Mama with them that they couldn't bring back." Mama tries to get the money for Randy's appeal together because "you can die in them jails just from having a broken spirit."

Myers uses this story to show how institutions in the ghetto work. The one institution, the school, that should be a help for Jamal is another source of his feeling of inadequacy and despair. The one thing that Jamal is good at is drawing, but when stage

scenery has to be painted, Jamal is relegated to adjusting the windows. Myers uses incidents like this and the dialogue of teachers and the principal to show that school is a cold, uncaring place. When Jamal is late, the principal makes him sit a long time before talking to him. Without giving him a chance to explain, the principal starts a harangue which includes, "Look at me when I talk to you, young man." Tears come to Jamal's eyes when Mr. Davidson says, "I would ask you to bring your mother to school, but she probably doesn't care any more about your education than you do." When he does not have his homework, Mrs. Rich says, "I'm sure you like the seventh grade enough to spend another year in it." When he and Scorpions 3969 another boy are sent to the principal's office, Mr. Davidson says, "Why are you associating with somebody like Hicks? . . . if you continue to find people like Jamal Hicks for your friends, you're going to be in trouble if you like it or not." He tells Jamal that he is not going to give him a warning because he is just waiting for him to do something that is bad enough for him to be thrown out of the school. Whenever Jamal does something right at school, nobody notices.

Sometimes Myers shows how stereotyping limits someone's chances to succeed. When Sassy wants to get a job, Jamal says, "It take a man to get a job."

When Sassy wants her father to say that Jamal should do the dishes, he says, "That ain't no man's job." The wino voiced black prejudice against Puerto Ricans. "All them Puerto Ricans do is drink that tequila and get crazy.

. . . That's what makes them so oldlooking. You see baby Puerto Ricans and old Puerto Ricans, that's all you see. You don't see no regular Puerto Ricans. . . . And if you get into a fight with a Puerto Rican, you got to look out in case he got a knife.

Myers brings religion into the story.

Mama prays and even has the preacher come to the house to pray for Randy.

When he sees that prayer does not help, Jamal gets mad at God, but his mama says that he should not be mad at God because "God didn't shoot nobody." After the shooting Tito is not concerned with the death or injury; he knows only that God is going to punish him and that he is going to hell. He asks Jamal to pray for him.

Jamal and Tito live in the real world where money is scarce, but they have wishes and dreams that come into the story every once in a while. Jamal wishes he could surprise his mother with a VCR. He keeps a wish list in the back of his notebook. Jamal daydreams that a rich lady will give him and Tito a hundred dollars apiece or that she has a lawyer husband who will take Randy's case. The two boys go to the boat place and plan which ones they will buy when they grow up and have money. With a boat they can sail to Puerto Rico where it is warm and Tito will not have asthma. After the school gun problem, Jamal goes to the boat dock. He thinks that he may have to run away from home, but he imagines coming back grown up, dressed up, and successful. He imagines buying a big car, driving it to the penitentiary, and having Randy look out the window and see him in the driver's seat.

Style

Point of View

The novel is told in third person omniscient narration. The narrator has full access to the minds and thoughts of the two main characters. This gives a better insight into their motivations and their struggles. It helps give greater depth to the characterization. It is through this point of view that we get to understand what leads Jamal to be enamored with the power of a gun and his frustration with the bullies. Jamal never provokes any of the other boys. The bullies pick on him. He is a true victim who takes the abuse quietly, and so it perpetuates.

Through this point of view, we understand Tito's deep concerns and insights into possible trouble. Tito often expresses his concern about having a gun. He is aware of its potential danger. Jamal and Tito endear themselves to the reader because the reader can walk in their shoes. Their struggles in a harsh reality and their deep true friendship are expressed through this point of view, making the characters real and likeable.

Third person omniscient narration also allows the reader to feel the emotional turmoil Mama is in because her son is in jail. The reader is privy to her pain when she witnesses what the other prisoners have done to her son by stabbing him. Mama is helpless because she is poor and does not have the money for an appeal. The plea in her voice to Jamal to be good and her heavy sobs over her troubles give the reader further insight into the harsh life in the ghetto.

Setting

The setting of the story is in the inner city ghetto, Harlem. The setting is filled with boarded up buildings, drug addicts and winos on the street. The parks and apartment steps hold the traffic of dereliction. The crack house is part of the setting, where the drug dealers market their wares. The abandoned firehouse, once a setting for saving lives, becomes a hangout for young people drawn into a life of selling the drugs that takes lives. The apartments are small and bug-infested. The living conditions are vibrant yet sad. The time of year is October, when the chill begins to fill the air and warm shower water would be most welcome.

Language and Meaning

Except for Mack, all of the characters speak in the language of the poor. It is an uneducated form of speech. Mack, on the other hand, speaks the language of the street. He uses catchphrases and words with a different meaning for him than usual. Jamal and Tito understand Mack, even though they do not use the slang he does in their ordinary speech. They are close enough to the street to understand its slang.

Dialogue and description build the story line and give depth to the main characters. The minor characters are not short-changed, either. There is enough substance given them to form a full and appropriate view of their characters. For example, Randy is never seen but only mentioned as the perpetrator of a crime. He is alluded to in reference to money needed for an appeal and how he made money by selling drugs. Randy's character can therefore be easily described as disreputable and self-centered. He does not appear to have any remorse or care about his mother.

Structure

The novel consists of twenty chapters. The storyline flows in chronological order, with only a single insertion of a memory of times past, when Jamal recalls the arrest of Randy. The plot structure is fast-paced. The chapters are short and move between the Hicks' apartment, school, the crack house and the park in smooth transitions. The literary element of situational irony is key in the structure of the story.

Jamal is given a gun by Mack so that he can be the leader of the Scorpions. Jamal soon learns of the power of the gun when he stands in control over the bullies. He knows that he should get rid of the gun and voices this to Tito, but in his heart he knows he will not. Tito verbalizes his concerns and deep fear of the gun from the moment they have possession of it. He becomes like a broken record to Jamal to get rid of it. Yet, twice when Tito is in possession of the gun himself as a favor to Jamal, he is the one who gets into the most trouble with it.

When Jamal needs to hide the gun, he asks Tito to keep it at his apartment. Unfortunately, Tito's grandmother, Abuela, finds the gun and throws him out. Tito eventually returns to his grandmother's house, but Tito is deeply troubled by this turn of events. When Jamal and Tito go to the park to meet Indian and Angel, Jamal asks Tito to stay in the shadows with the gun. Tito sees Angel and Indian attack Jamal. When Indian attempts to stab Jamal, Tito uses the gun. He kills Angel and wounds Indian.

The build-up in the story from Tito's fear of the gun to Tito using the gun is a strong literary thread. This situational irony is used to underscore the danger of a gun being in the hands of children. The unwilling handler of the gun loses a great deal. He is emotionally deeply shaken. He never meant to hurt anyone. Tito must answer for the murder. Even though it was in defense of his friend, a life was lost. Tito owns up to it and tells his grandmother, who takes him to the police. The friendship between Jamal and Tito is almost lost over it. The irony is hard-hitting.

Quotes

"Dwayne made Jamal feel small inside." Chapter Three

"That was the way Tito was. He got nervous sometimes, but he wouldn't let you down."
Chapter Four

"Jamal had looked at Randy. He was looking cool. Jamal hated that. You weren't supposed to be looking cool when you made your mother cry." Chapter Four

"But if I'm in the Scorpions, maybe we can get them to do some good things, too.'

"And we can look out for each other.'" Chapter Seven

"Jamal felt the same about his father as he did about Randy. They were both gone, and each of them had taken a little piece of Mama with them that they couldn't bring back."
Chapter Eight

"He hated it when his father came and talked about 'straightening him out.' It wasn't like he was there all the time to talk to him or help or anything." Chapter Nine

"It felt good having a job." Chapter Twelve

"Sometimes when things get hard, we tend to set our sights on what's hard, that difficult thing that keeps us upset, and we turn our backs on our strengths." Chapter Fourteen

"And the biggest temptation is to let how hard it is be an excuse to weaken." Chapter Fourteen

"They [winos and crackheads] look like they thrown away people. That makes me scared because I don't want to be no thrown away guy.'

"That's why we got to be like this' - Jamal held up two fingers close together - 'so we don't let nobody throw us away.'" Chapter Fifteen

"I was just thinking that if somebody starts messing with me, I could make them stop if I had the gun." Chapter Fifteen

"Lord, when am I going to learn that my problems don't belong to nobody but me?"
Chapter Sixteen

"Jamal wondered if there would ever be a time in his life when he didn't have to worry about somebody beating him up, or being in a fight with somebody." Chapter Seventeen

"Jamal thought about Randy being scared up in the prison and him being scared down here in Harlem." Chapter Eighteen

"Tito stood and looked for a moment at his friend, he took the picture from him." Chapter Twenty

Topics for Discussion

1. How important is it for ethnic groups to use standard English? Jamal likes grammar, and could use good language if he wanted to, but at school he uses the word "yeah" to answer Mr. Davidson's question, and the principal corrects him. " 'Yes' . . . At least try to talk as if you're civilized." How would he be regarded if he used "good" English in his neighborhood?

2. Why do the Scorpions not want members as old as Randy and Mack?

Why do they want young boys?

3. Which incidents in the book show that these adults do not respect or care for children?

4. Discuss this statement, "Guys who were tough seemed tougher when they weren't too smart."

5. Discuss Mama's statement, "Tito, sometimes we women got to be harder on you young boys than we want to be.

You know that and I know that. Me and your grandmother, we try our best, but God knows it's hard. We say things we don't mean because to say the things we mean is just too hurtin'."

6. List times when Jamal has trouble at school and what the principal and teachers do or say. What could or should the principal do? How could the school make a positive difference in the boys' lives? Is this treatment going on in schools outside of Harlem?

7. Jamal does not want to become "a thrown away person." What does he mean? What should he do to make sure that he does not become one?

8. Discuss the relationship between Jamal and his father. Why does his father not like for Jamal to draw? Why does his father find so much fault and threaten to hurt him?

9. What does Mama mean when she says, "Lord, when am I ever going to learn that my problems don't belong to nobody but me?" Does she blame Mr. Stanton? In ordinary everyday life is the statement true?

Essay Topics

Who would you designate as the hero of the novel? Support your answer with details from the book. Does this character follow the true definition of hero? Why or why not? If not, why have you still made him or her your choice?

Chart the unseen character of Randy Hicks as a driving force in the novel.

Trace the gun as motif in the novel. How has the gun influenced the characters' actions? How has the gun affected the outcome? How has the gun defined the story?

Compare and contrast Jamal and Tito. As best friends, is their relationship based on similarities of nature or differences? Would you call their friendship solid? Would you agree with them that they are best friends?

Examine the following quote and apply it to the novel:

Sometimes when things get hard, we tend to set our sights on what's hard, that difficult thing that keeps us upset, and we turn our backs on our strengths. Reverend Biggs

In the last paragraph of the novel, Jamal is confronted with a kid who is bigger than he is. Jamal tilts his head and hardens his stare. The kid moves on. What is the significance of the stare? Has Jamal changed? If you were to write a follow up chapter based on this stare, what would it say?

Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Research the use of slang, the part it plays in social groups, and how it comes in and goes out of use. Collect slang words and phrases, then define them, use in them sentences, and create a dictionary of slang (perhaps called "Slanguage"). Ask older people what slang words they used when they were young.

2. Research what goes on in institutions for juvenile delinquents? What conditions and restrictions do the inmates live with? How many are rehabilitated and better because of the incarceration, and how many go on to more crime and more jail terms? Jamal thinks he knows what jail was like.

"The big guys ganged up on you and beat you up and then they had sex with you." Is he right? Probation officers, guards, police officers, or former inmates could contribute to this research.

3. Choose a character such as Mack, Indian, Abuela, Mr. Davidson, Sassy, or Mr. Gonzalez, and write a character study of that person. Write some part of the story from that person's standpoint.

4. Find out how drug rings operate both in big cities and in your own area.

Someone from the police or sheriff's department could speak to the group.

5. Research a minority group in the United States. What are the numbers and where do they settle? What kind of prejudice arises against the minority?

Who are the leaders of the group? How well are they educated? What kind of jobs do they do? It may be possible to get a guest speaker from the minority group.

6. Compare another book by Myers to *Scorpions*.

7. Read and report on Chapter 8: "Developing Racial Tolerance with Literature on the Black Inner-City" by James A. Banks. (In *Black Image: Education Copes with Color* edited by Jean Grambs and John Carr and published by the Wm. C. Brown Company in 1972).

8. Read and report on Part 1 of *Variant English: An Introduction to Language Variation* by Diane Bryen, Cheryl Harman, and Pearl Tait (Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company in 1978).

9. Myers says, "Children are the most important people we have in this country, and children's writing is the most important kind of writing." Read and respond to his article, "Let Us Celebrate the Children."

Further Study

"Author's View." Scholastic Book Talk (Spring 1992): 6. Scholastic puts out promotional material about authors and books in connection with book sales. Although it helps to sell books, it is also helpful for teachers.

Bishop, Rudine Sims. *Presenting Walter Dean Myers*. Boston: Twayne, 1990.

As an adjunct to the reading of *Scorpions*, students may be interested in knowing something about the author and what brought him to write the book. It could be used for a special report, or a teacher could use it as a part of his or her presentation of the novel.

———. "Profile: Walter Dean Myers."

Language Arts 67 (December 1990): 862-866. This is a shortened version of Bishop's book listed above. In order to do the book and the article he had a personal interview and several phone calls with Myers and used information from speeches given by the author. Material from the article could be used by the teacher to introduce the unit on *Scorpions*.

Evory, Ann, ed. *Contemporary Authors*.

Detroit: Gale, 1978: 592-593. Provides personal information as well as career moves and writings. Useful for background information about the author to go along with the study of the book.

Grambs, Jean Dresden, and John C. Carr. *Black Image: Education Copes with Color*. Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown, 1972: 122-146. This guide for teachers addresses how to work with different perspectives which black students bring to the classroom. The chapters on literature are particularly good. Includes an annotated and graded bibliography of integrated and black books for children.

Holtze, Sally Holmes, ed. *The Fifth Book of Junior Authors and Illustrators*. New York: H. W. Wilson, 1983: 225-226. In this short article Myers reminisces about his past and includes some anecdotes that students may find interesting.

Huck, Charlotte S., Susan Hepler, and Janet Hickman. *Children's Literature in the Elementary School*. 4th ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1987: 501-502. Brief discussion about living in a pluralistic society which leads into the criteria for selecting racial and ethnic books for use in the classroom.

Micklos, John. "Author Walter Dean Myers Stresses Realism in His Writing." *Reading Today* 8,4 (February/March, 1991): 38. Provides background on Myers's attitudes toward his writing and his audience.

Myers, Walter Dean. "Let Us Celebrate the Children." *The Horn Book Magazine* 66 (January-February, 1990): 46-47. In lyrical language Myers gives his child-centered philosophy about life and writing. It enhances the study of the author's motivation.

Raymond, Allen. "Walter Dean Myers: A 'Bad Kid' Who Makes Good."

Teaching K-8 (October, 1989): 53-55.

The article is based on a question and answer interview with the author and contains a very good picture. Provides interesting insight as to what makes a writer.

Related Titles

Scorpions deals with growing up black or Puerto Rican in a slum section of a big city where gangs, drugs, broken homes, poverty, poor schools, and violence are a constant threat. Another novel that deals with living in the ghetto or about gangs is Paula Fox's, *How Many Miles to Babylon?* (1967). In it, to escape harsh reality, James fantasizes that he is really an African prince whose ancestors were brought to America to be slaves. While playing at his fantasy in an abandoned house, he is caught by a gang and forced to take part in the theft of valuable dogs. He becomes stronger as he escapes and assumes responsibility for the dogs, and he realizes the truth about himself, his mother, and his place in the ghetto.

In Eleanor Hull's *Moncho and the Dukes* (1968), two boys living in the same building in East Harlem are having problems in school and in their neighborhood. A church-sponsored gang takes them in with the aim of doing good instead of violence.

In Kristin Hunter's *The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou* (1969), Lou is a fourteen year old girl who is a member of a gang that has weapons. Hatred for whites, acceptance of self, violence involving police, and gang action are factors in the story which ends in the success of their singing group. Students could compare the realism in *Scorpions* with what they find in *The Soul Brothers* and discuss which book is more believable.

Stephen M. Joseph's *The Me Nobody Knows: Children's Voices from the Ghetto* (1969), is a book of poetry and prose written by children of the ghetto in which they tell of their fears and hopes as they grow up in slum conditions.

Children who do not know what it is to grow up in the inner city can "walk in other shoes" and see what life is like for the boys in *Scorpions* and the children who wrote for this book.

There are other novels that deal with life in black neighborhoods that share themes with *Scorpions*. One is Frank Bonham's *The Nitty Gritty* (1969). The boys in *Scorpions* dream of getting out of the ghetto, being rich, dressing fine, and owning a yacht. In *The Nitty Gritty* Charlie dreams of getting out of the ghetto, too. His father tells him about honest work, but his uncle sells him on a scheme for quick riches by owning a cock and betting on the fight. After the big let-down, Charlie has to deal with the reality of his situation.

One of the most celebrated books for young adults is S. E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* (1967). This is the harsh story of teen-agers who live in a world of poverty and constant danger from rumble between two gangs, the Socs and the Greasers. Ponyboy Curtis lives with his brothers because his parents died in an automobile accident. When Ponyboy arrives home at 2:00 a.m., and his brother hits him, he runs to a park where he is jumped by five drunk Socs, and his friend Johnny kills one of them with his knife. The boys take refuge in a church and later rescue some children from it when it burns. The fire causes them to be hospitalized. Only Ponyboy is alive at the end of the book.

On the back of the paperback the National Observer said that it showed "What it's like to live lonely and unwanted and cornered by circumstance."

Could that statement be made about *Scorpions*?

There are several nonfiction books on gangs that would make good reading for young adults. One is Sandra Gardner's *Street Gangs* (1983). Since the main terror of *Scorpions* revolves around the gang, students could profit from this book about gangs and how they operate. Another more recent book by Gardner is *Street Gangs in America* (1992), which presents the violence perpetrated by street gangs. This is a good source for special oral or written reports. It could also be used to tie the literature class to social studies.

James Haskins's *Street Gangs: Yesterday and Today* (1974) traces the history of street gangs and is a good source of background information that correlates with *Scorpions*.

In addition, there is Evan Stark's *Everything You Need to Know about Street Gangs* (1991), a book about street gangs which can provide insight on the background for the story of *Scorpions*.

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