

Slam! Study Guide

Slam! by Walter Dean Myers

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Plot Summary

“Slam!” is a young adult novel by Walter Dean Myers. The story revolves around the efforts of seventeen year-old Greg “Slam” Harris to play basketball, while maintaining his academics and his personal life. Slam lives in Harlem and attends the prestigious magnet school Latimer in the South Bronx. The school is predominantly white. It has a failing basketball program. Slam is attending Latimer as part of a policy that enables schools to become more diverse.

Over the course of several months, Slam helps lead the Latimer Panthers to victory, including one over his former school’s team. Slam’s lifelong friendship with Ice disintegrates as Ice turns to drug dealing to get ahead. Slam’s love life heats up when he begins seeing Mtisha. At the same time, Slam’s grandmother gets sick and goes into the hospital. She will recover eventually. Slam’s father, recently unemployed, turns to the bottle. Slam’s mother holds everything together.

Goldstein is the team's assistant coach. He becomes a grandfatherly mentor to Slam, telling Slam that life is a game as well- it can be won, or it can be lost. The choice is ultimately up to Slam. Slam takes Goldstein’s advice and looks ahead to the future.



Chapters 1-5

Summary

Chapter 1

Basketball is Greg “Slam” Harris’s life. He is an excellent player. When Mr. Tate, the school principal, tells Slam’s mother Moms that Slam should stop playing basketball until he gets his grades together, it is as if his world stops. It makes for sleepless nights. Slam can hear the wind, boom boxes, and people talking outside, as well as police and ambulance sirens. Slam thinks about things that bother him over and over again. Slam loves his mother. His mother is worried about his grades. She almost cries at Mr. Tate’s office. Slam’s father Pops works here and there. When he works, he doesn’t drink too much. Slam’s younger brother, nine year-old Derek, has a big mouth and nothing to back it up, so Slam, at seventeen, worries about Derek. Slam goes upstairs to think about things. He reflects on how Mr. Tate had explained to Moms that if Slam didn’t get his grades together, he would be transferred back to Carver. Slam currently attends Latimer for the visual arts program. Latimer’s school policy is designed to have more black kids to attend to magnet schools.

Slam talks to Moms as she finishes up preparing dinner. He explains that he might as well go back to Carver because without basketball he will feel like he is jail. Moms stresses the importance of catching up academically. She tells him that maybe he should lay off basketball for a while.

Slam recalls trying out for basketball, getting there late, and meeting Coach Nipper and Assistant Coach Goldstein. At the tryout is Ducky, a red-headed kid, who is the first person Slam meets at Latimer. There are few black kids at Latimer. Mr. Tate himself is black. There is only one other black kid on Slam’s floor, Jimmy Ellis. Slam watches the basketball tryouts, waiting to jump in. One of the white guys playing appears to know what he is doing. The coach tells Slam to go in on center, but Slam says he is a guard. The coach tells him to stay seated, then. After tryouts, Slam says he is better than anyone there, and the coach himself challenges Slam to one-on-one. Slam wins, and the coach puts him on the team. Ducky tells Slam that he and Nick, one of the white guys who knows how to play well, are the best on the team.

At home, Derek explains that Moms is out because Grandma is sick. Mom had left money for cold cuts, but Derek didn’t go out to buy any because there was a drive-by on 141st. A little girl was grazed by the bullet, but she isn’t hurt bad. Slam hates drive-by shootings. Slam doesn’t want to get shot on purpose or accidentally.

Chapter 2

Ducky and Slam have lockers right next to each other, and Ducky thinks they are tight. Actually, Slam thinks Ducky is just alright. Ducky is an amazing guitar player. Ducky



shows Slam a newspaper article about the South Bronx Latimer Magnet School's Panther basketball team. They are facing a fifth consecutive losing season. Ducky, learning about Slam's basketball talents, believes they will have a winning season, and Slam tells him to bet on it.

Since Latimer is a magnet school, people from all over attend. Most of them, like Slam, take the train. On the way home, he shoots a smile at some attractive girls who get off at 161st Street. In his neighborhood, he hears everyone talking about the twenty-something million-dollar lottery up for grabs. He goes over to the park and see one of his best friends, Ice, and a mutual female friend, Mtisha. They go get some potato wedges and sodas, and Ice says that he misses Slam on the team at Carver. Slam explains the white basketball players are alright, but not great. The manager of the place chases them out when they stick around too long.

Slam recounts how he and Ice were always tight. But, over the past year, things cooled off a little between them, possibly because of Mtisha. Maybe, they were all just getting older. Ice heads out on his own to go check out some beepers. All the cool kids have beepers, like drug dealers. Beepers mean you are somebody important, in one way or another. This leaves Mtisha alone with Slam. Mtisha is beautiful, and Slam likes her. She tells him she likes him, but he shouldn't fall in love with her. Her father had gone to college, and Mtisha was all set to go as well. Slam brings Mtisha inside, hoping for a kiss. She refuses. She says that all of a sudden, Ice has a lot of money. Some say it is from college scouts; others say that Ice has been hanging with serious drug dealers near Garvey Park. Slam doesn't believe that Ice is getting involved with dealing. Mtisha then kisses Slam and heads out.

Slam thinks about Ice, whose real name is Benny Reese. He earned the nickname Ice because he looks like the old rapper Ice T. Slam is convinced that there is no way that Ice could be dealing because they had seen too many guys get messed up. Ice is also too good a player, with too good a future ahead of him. Slam remembers seeing Ice in the park with some people he didn't know, seeing Ice drink from a brown bag, and declaring it was just a forty. But, Slam thinks it was something else. Nevertheless, he decides to check up on Ice.

Chapter 3

Slam and Moms go to Harlem Hospital on 135th to visit Grandma Ellie. She tells Slam to invest in his education and to get his grades up because it is his life. Only he and his mother care about his life. Slam takes her encouragement as running him down, and is annoys him a little. On the way out, Moms begins crying because Ellie has a tumor that has spread. She doesn't want to lose her mother.

Chapter 4

After two bad practices, Slam hopes that the team will get better as they continue practicing. At home, Derek asks Slam to sew his pants because he has ripped them along the seam playing basketball. Derek announces he wants to play Slams' position



when he goes to Latimer one day. At the next practice, the coach hounds Slam about teamwork and for not working with Nick Young, Trip, or Ducky. Goldstein goes to talk to Slam to see what's bothering him. Slam feels dissed. Goldstein says the coach wants him to play pattern ball that will benefit the team. Goldstein explains he used to coach basketball, but following a heart attack, he went to part time. Goldstein explains that he played when he was younger because he loved the game. However, he was never really good at basketball. He tells Slam to not focus on life being unfair, but on the fact that he has so much talent.

That afternoon, a white girl named Karen asks Slam to pose for her. She shows him a picture of praying hands by Durer. At home, Slam thinks about Coach Nipper and the basketball practice. Slam is angry that he has been dissed on the court in view of the other team members.

Chapter 5

Slam is bored in history class while Mr. Penny talks about the arguments leading up to the Constitution. Charley Movalli and some other kids are in the band room with Karen when Slam shows up to be sketched. They all watch the process. Karen tells Slam he has great hands, and Slam thinks he might marry her. In Mr. Aumack's homeroom the next morning, Slam is notified that he is to go to Mr. Tate's office. His parents are also there. Richie Randall, a black man and a graduate of Howard University, is a working engineer who has long been friends with Tate. He is also with the Guardians, a group that tutors young, African Americans. Tate wants Richie to tutor Slam in math. Moms and Tate press Slam to work with Richie. Slam says he will think about it. With Pops out of work again, Slam feels as if his mother is trying to bring in a surrogate father.

At practice, Coach Nipper explains a smaller budget means a shorter, regular season. There are eight schools in the league, including them. He first game is against Regis, and Regis has amazing cheerleaders. Slam feels miserable he is not starting, especially when he sees Ice watching in the audience with five other guys from the hood. By the end of the first half, the score is Regis 30 and Latimer 21. Ice comes down to ask Slam why he isn't playing, and Slam says it is probably because the coach doesn't like him. Nipper then asks Slam who he was talking to, and Slam is impressed that Nipper has heard of Benny Ice Reese. Nipper eventually puts Slam in. Slam makes his first basket.

Analysis

When Walter Dean Myers' novel "Slam!" opens, Greg "Slam" Harris is quick to explain to the reader that he is in love with basketball and basketball is his life. There is nothing else in his life that matters as much. This is quickly made clear by the information that Slam's academics are suffering severely as a result of his dedicating himself so much more to sports than school. The situation is so dire that the school's principal (Mr. Tate) and Sam's mother encourage him to take his academics more seriously. They go so far as to say that Slam should give basketball a rest for a while. But to Slam, this is unimaginable.



At the same time as Slam's future in basketball seems uncertain, his personal life appears to be unraveling as well. His grandmother has to go into the hospital. Although Slam would rather be somewhere other than the hospital, he does love his grandmother. So, he visits her while she is a patient. Additionally, Ice, who is Slam's best friend since childhood, appears to be moving off in his own direction. Ice might be selling drugs. This worries both Slam and Mtisha. Slam's romantic attempts with Mtisha have all failed so far, mostly due to Mtisha's unwillingness to simply jump into something with Slam and Slam's lack of patience. The only escape that Slam has now is basketball. Now, there is a possibility that could be taken away.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Slam love basketball so much? What positive influence does basketball have on his life? Are there any negative consequences? Explain.

Discussion Question 2

Between all of the issues Slam is currently facing –losing out on basketball, suffering academically, his grandmother, his love life, and Ice –which ones are worse? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Mtisha resist Slam's romantic advances? How does Slam respond to this? Why?

Vocabulary

Magnet school, deliberately, brainiac, prejudiced, decent.



Chapters 6-9

Summary

Chapter 6

Slam, Nick, and Trip all work to bring Latimer to within six points of Regis. Nipper tells them to stay focused and to pay attention because Regis will try to slow the game down and draw fouls. With this knowledge, Slam and the others work around the Regis players, getting up by nine points with a minute to go. They end up winning by eleven points. Everyone, including Nick, compliment Slam on his game. So does Ice, who has two okay-looking girls with him. He says that they are going to Laurelton. He wants Slam to come, too. Slam is still excited about the game, and homework is unappealing. So, he goes with them. Ice is driving a silver Benz. He and a girl named Bianca sit in the front. Slam and Ceil, whom everyone calls Kicky, sit in the back. Kicky snuggles up to Slam. Ice comments that Slam has gotten stronger. Ice says Carver played and beat Saint Peter's School.

Kicky steps out from the restaurant to smoke. Slam goes with her. Kicky offers Slam a cigarette, but he refuses, saying it would mess up his game. Slam asks Kicky where Ice got the car. She says that she thinks it belongs to his cousin. He and Kicky make out. Ice and Bianca return, and they drive on. Ice drops Bianca off, and then Kicky. At home, Slam explains he went with Ice to Queens, and Moms says they should be brothers because they get along so well. She says that Pops doesn't mind Richie Randall, but the decision to work with him in tutoring is up to Slam. She reveals as well that she was in the stands, and everyone was talking about how well Slam played. Slam didn't know his mother was there, and she says she will always be there.

Slam later wonders about Ice telling him the car was loaned to him by a friend. For a project, Slam ends up partnered with Marjorie "Margie" Flatley, a girl who thinks she is hot stuff and is quick to hand out disses. They decide to do a documentary. Slam wants to do a documentary about his life. He will film about ten hours of footage, after which Margie will edit it and add music. Slam and Ducky later talk. He says five more guys want to get on the team after seeing Slam play. Ducky is worried that he will be benched or kicked off the team because he doesn't think that he is very good. Slam tells Ducky he is better than he gives himself credit for and he can't be afraid to play. He just needs to play. People all around school are buzzing about Slam and his talents. It makes Slam feel proud. It also makes him think about the future game with Carver and how he will be able to one-up Ice. Slam brings home a video camera from school.

Moms asks Slam to go with her to the hospital to see Grandma Ellie. At the hospital, Grandma Ellie is sleeping. She had fluid in her lungs, which had to be pumped out. A nurse explains that Grandma Ellie was gagging on the tubes, so they gave her a sedative. At practice the next day, Nipper announces there will be no new team members. Ducky still doesn't play as well as he could. Nick asks to go one-on-one with



Slam, and Slam agrees. Jimmy whispers to Slam that the coach wanted Nick to go one-on-one with Slam. Slam wonders what it is all about. Surprisingly, Nick keeps up with Slam, though he loses in the end. Jimmy explains to Slam later on that Nipper thinks Slam has an attitude problem. Jimmy says that all the guys get along well, and Slam shouldn't jam on the team so much. He should try to get along with everyone. This angers Slam.

Chapter 7

Slam works on his video project while Moms and Derek go to see Grandma Ellie. While they are gone, Mtisha comes to see Slam. She wants to know where he was the previous night. Mtisha is enraged to hear that Slam was making out with Kicky. She storms out, believing that Slam is looking over her shoulder because she is not giving Slam what other girls give to guys. Slam feels bad and apologizes, but he accepts things the way they are. Slam decides that he will call Mtisha later and apologize again. Then, he will call up Bianca and yell at her for telling Mtisha that he was making out with Kicky. Slam goes filming around the neighborhood, including Carl's Curio Shop. A woman is trying to sell something for a dollar. She leaves when she is unsuccessful. Carl explains the woman used to own a successful tailor shop, until she found the crack pipe. At home, Slam tries calling Mtisha, but her mother refuses to let Slam speak to her and calls him a lowlife.

Chapter 8

Slam spends the weekend shooting tape around 125th Street and playing ball at 135th Street YMCA. He plays with some guys there. One guy, Kenny Stith, had even played in Italy, whereas his own uncle had played with the Knicks. He explains being in the NBA isn't enough. You have to be hungry for the ball all the time and not let your mind go elsewhere. Kenny compliments Slam's skills. Slam sees Kenny leave with a woman and a child. He assumes that they must be his family. Slam decides that when he gets to the NBA, he will not have a family. Slam later rethinks this and decides he does want a wife and at least one kid. On New Year's Day, Slam calls Mtisha and asks for another chance. She says she will think about it.

Back in school, Mr. Greene hands out a math test, the first of a four-part test, which will count for twenty-five percent of final grades. Slam is horrified. He does his best to get through the problems. After the test, several kids talk about how easy it was, but Slam doesn't think so. The night of the game with Saint Peter's arrives. The Saint Peter's Marauders prove to be a tricky team. Nevertheless, the Latimer Panthers get up six to four.

Chapter 9

By halftime, Saint Peter's is ahead, 32-22. Slam sees Trips blind father up in the stands, listening to a girl tell him about the game as it unfolds. Goldstein tells Slam to stop showing off while playing. Slam thinks the coach is still mad about being shown up in one-on-one. Goldstein tells him that, although people can argue with what he says, no



one can argue with what he accomplishes. Slam ignores Goldstein and gets impatient with Jimmy, which gets Nick angry. Ducky then jumps in on Slam's behalf. Jose tells them all to cool it. Slam even helps the competition on the court, and a foul shot from Nick wins the game for Latimer. Goldstein tells Slam that Nick won the game for the team. He also tells Slam that he got a 34 on his math test. If he doesn't get his grades together, he won't be on the team. Outside, Jimmy and Ducky are arguing, while Nick tries to stop them. Ducky tackles Nick and Slam pulls Nick off Ducky. But Mr. Tate shows up and nobody goes any further. Ducky says it won't help the team if this goes on. He says that he will call Nick later. Slam goes home unhappy, especially about the math test.

Analysis

Slam acts frequently without thinking things through too much. After all, he is a teenager. But, his actions have consequences. He will soon come to realize that everything he does has consequences and he isn't always right. This is clearly the case with Kicky and Mtisha. Without thinking, Slam makes out with Kicky, which enrages and breaks Mtisha's heart. She isn't like Kicky, or like most girls. She has class, grace, and a moral system uncommon for her peers. Slam is not expecting this, and he doesn't quite know how to react to it, considering that it is uncommon. He ultimately apologizes to Mtisha, but she is unwilling to accept his apology for the time being, and rightfully so.

Slam, in the meantime, has not been taking his academics seriously. A score of 34 on a math test only compounds the problem and makes things worse for him. Slam responds by lashing out at those around him and withdrawing more. His attitude, not great to begin with, only worsens, as he is unable to see that he is his biggest problem. However, this also blinds Slam to the fact that there are people who do genuinely care about him and how he is doing. One of them is the Assistant Coach Goldstein. Goldstein's attempts to get through to Slam have mostly failed at this point. However, little by little, Goldstein is breaking Slam down. His goal is not to see Slam fall, but to see Sam realize his potential as a person on and off the basketball court.

Discussion Question 1

Grandma Ellie offers Slam the advice –and the warning –that his life is his and his alone. Does Slam take her seriously? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Slam refuse to open up or listen to Coach Goldstein? What consequences does this have for Slam?



Discussion Question 3

Why does Slam make out with Kicky? What ultimately happens as a result? How does Slam try to handle the problem? What is the result? Why?

Vocabulary

Violation, jive, sedative, nonchalantly, humongous.



Chapters 10-13

Summary

Chapter 10

Derek coaxes Slam to go shoot video from the roof. Slam finds that the neighborhood looks nice early in the morning from the rooftops. He films people going to work and a beer delivery. Moms is making breakfast. Pops is grouchy and grumpy. He has second thoughts about Richie helping Slam. At school, Ducky explains Nick has gotten over the fight and is willing to forget it. Slam says that if Nick has a problem, he'd better get over it, fast. Later, Margie reviews Slam's footage, and Karen, who is also in the video room, watches as well. Margie appears as if she is watching a freak show, for she is so fascinated by the ghetto. Slam is angered and walks out with the tape. He walks and talks with Mtisha later. She tells Slam he's got to relax and get a better immune system for his emotions because he is letting everyone mess with him. They both realize they haven't seen Ice in a while. Slam wonders if Mtisha might cut him loose one day because she is so smart and he is not.

Later, Slam goes to see Ice. He is in front of VJ Records, right next to his place. The sight of him makes Slam nervous. Two men approach Ice about a dime, and Ice says he has nothing. He explains to Slam that as soon as you have a little something going on, everyone thinks you've got drugs. They agree to hang out the next day. Slam can tell that Ice might not be using, but he is most likely dealing.

Chapter 11

Nick sits with Slam at lunch and asks him if he wants to fight. Slam says it makes no difference. Nick says Slam needs to learn to get along with people and that the world doesn't owe him anything. Nick has no problem with Slam's game, just his attitude. Latimer takes on Country Day in a game. By half-time, the score is 32-22. Slam can tell Nick is trying to one-up him. They end up winning the game, but Ducky ends up messing up a play. He is so disheartened that he wants to quit. Slam puts his arm around Ducky. Slam tells him not to quit and not to worry. In the next game, he'll have Ducky's back.

Slam goes to see Mtisha. He has come to really like her. She tries to tutor him in math, but Slam is afraid to really try, so he goes on home. Derek confesses he has lost Slam's video camera. He left it on the stoop to get some cookies. When he went back, it was gone. Slam decides to go see Carl. Carl says he'll keep an eye out for the camera if someone brings it in to sell it. Slam later learns from Moms that Grandma Ellie is not doing well, and it is a day-to-day thing. Slam goes with Moms to the hospital. Grandma Ellie doesn't look good. She gives Slam her love and tells him to look after his mother. Slam later calls Mtisha to apologize, and she says he should be sorry.



Chapter 12

The Latimer Panthers travel by bus to get to Trinity. Slam wonders if he is afraid of math the way that Ducky is afraid of basketball. Slam also hears that a scout is coming to check out Nick, and Slam feels hurt that a scout isn't coming to check him out. Nick explains he'll need a scholarship to get into any school. Coach Nipper tells the team that Trinity is one of the teams with a shot at the championship. Jimmy apologizes to Slam for the fight. Slam squares off against a white guy named Brothers, who looks strange with a ponytail, but is known as a good player. He and Slam mouth off to one another. By the end of the first half, the Panthers are behind, 28-16. Everyone decides they will work to get Slam the ball. But it is Ducky who notices that Trinity keeps setting things up for Brothers. The Panthers then work together to get the ball in –and they win the game, or so Slam thinks, but the time runs out too soon.

Chapter 13

Coach Nipper tells everyone not to feel bad about losing because they played well. However, everyone can tell Nipper feels bad as well. Goldstein compliments Slam on the way the team brought things together by working as a team. Goldstein tells Slam to focus on the next game, not the past. At home, Slam discovers his father has broken his arm. Moms and Pops were out shopping, and Pops slipped on a newspaper which was covering up some spilled oil. Mtisha invites Slam to Sam's Fish Box for dinner. Slam decides to let Mtisha help him with math. He agrees to do some practice problems so she can zero in on where he needs help.

At school, Ducky explains that his parents are separated, and he hopes it is just temporary. Mr. Parrish tells Slam he thinks his tape is good. He thinks he has something going on with it. Slam later learns that the scout from Brown wants Nick to consider attending Brown, and Slam congratulates him. Later, Goldstein talks to Slam. Nick's grades are good, he explains, which is why Brown is considering him. The only person who can decide if Slam has a shot at college ball is Slam. He explains that the chance of doing what one loves is a gift from God. Lots of people work but don't get ahead because they aren't doing what they love. If Slam is serious about basketball, he must do it to the fullest.

Analysis

The basketball season continues along well for the Latimer Panthers, but internal struggles between the teammates prove dangerous to unity. Most of this originates from Slam's selfishness and his attitude towards the other team members. Fortunately, the team is able to put these differences mostly aside, and they work together to win game after game. It is no longer Slam trying to outshine everyone else, but Slam working with everyone else. This makes him shine as a result. Unfortunately, Slam is slow to understand this. Slam is also slow to understand that his chances of playing ball in college will depend totally on himself. No one can get Slam into college except himself, and playing a good round of ball will not be enough.



Slam does, however have a serious breakthrough in his thought processes. He wonders if he is afraid of academics the why that Ducky is afraid of fully committing to basketball. It makes sense. Slam's future depends on him. Improving his academics is crucial. His resolve is bolstered by news that Nick is being scouted by Brown. At the same time, Slam comes to recognize that he really does like Mtisha. He has decided that he is going to pursue her by her own rules. For the first time with Mtisha, Slam is able to step outside himself and see things from her point of view, and this will have profound and positive consequences for Slam.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Slam believe he might be afraid of his academics? Why is Ducky afraid of basketball? How does Slam use the example of Ducky to reflect on himself?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Goldstein persist in trying to get through to Slam? Does Slam start coming around? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

What realization does Slam come to regarding Mtisha? What does Slam intend to do about it?

Vocabulary

Civil, immune, unadulterated, beckoned, immature.



Chapters 14-17

Summary

Chapter 14

Slam goes to see Ice, but Ice isn't home, so he talks to Ice's mother. She tells him not to go out and make babies. When Slam leaves, Ice is outside with Willie King, who went to a Knicks camp. However, Willie got busted, did half a year in jail, and got raped there. Willie is happy to see Slam. Ice is dressed up in a fine suit and overcoat. Ice doesn't like Slam asking about it. Across the street, a man in his forties collapses and looks to be having a heart attack. Ice demands someone call 911. When a girl explains that she called them five minutes ago, Ice tells her to do it again. Ice gives the emergency workers who respond \$20 each. Slam is impressed at how Ice took charge of the situation. Ice insists he isn't dealing, and Slam appears to believe him.

At home, Slam's father has liquor on his breath. He says Mtisha has called. Slam calls her back. Mrs. Clark, Mtisha's mother, says he doesn't deserve a good girl like Mtisha, but there is humor in her voice. She tells Slam that Mtisha is a good cook. He should have her cook for him some night.

Mtisha tells Slam that someone sold Carl the video camera for a dime. Carl gave her the video camera. Now, Slam needs to give Carl a dime.

Chapter 15

The Trinity game against Carver arrives. Mtisha says hello to Slam at the game and explains a crackhead brought in the camera to sell. Slam is worried that Brothers will one-up Ice. Ice is incredible in the first half, but in the second half, looks tired. Carver wins the game anyways. Slam brings Mtisha home, and then heads home himself, wondering if Mtisha gets nervous around him sexually.

Chapter 16

Derek is thrilled the camera has been secured, safe and sound. Slam begins to worry about the coming SATs. Slam's combined PSAT scores are 740. The Panthers later face off against Hunter. Hunter is a good team. They don't do anything fancy, but they play hard. Coach Nipper calls Slam a "prima donna," and Slam stalks off into the locker room and sits by himself. Goldstein tells Slam to get his attitude together, play hard, play for himself, and come out for the second half. Slam listens and heads out. The team works together to get Slam the ball. They also work to get Nick and Jimmy the ball, and Latimer pulls it off by five points. Slam and Nick take the subway home. They get along very well. It makes Slam happy for his friendship with Ducky as well, and it makes him realize that being friends with Ice is getting harder and harder.

Chapter 17



Grandma Ellie gets out of the hospital, and Slam goes to visit her. She isn't getting any better or any worse for the time being. She makes him some tea, and they talk about Slam getting his grades up. Slam admits he needs to buckle down. In school, when he doesn't do his homework, Mr. Parrish asks Slam if all he wants out of life is stand on a corner and if his language is endemic of the African We-Be tribe. Slam throws his books, and Parrish heads toward the principal's office.

Slam goes to the corner restaurant and gets a cup of soup. Goldstein meets him there, and Slam admits he was wrong. Goldstein explains some of the kids in class are defending Slam to the principal. Goldstein wants to know why Slam has such an attitude and asks about him. Slam explains he got angry with Parrish, who accused him of wanting to be a corner guy. Goldstein explains he is in the game, on the court, and off the court. There is always a game being played. Goldstein explains that Slam is not in trouble because the other kids got Parrish to back off. Parrish will be watching Slam like a hawk, though. Slam thanks Goldstein for talking to him. Slam then apologizes to Parrish. He realizes that he needs to win off the court as well as on. Parrish and the other teachers are tough enough to maintain standards that will mean Slam will not graduate unless he excels. At home, Slam allows Derek to be his video assistant.

Analysis

As things seem to pick up for Slam personally, as well as academically, things also appear to be getting better for Ice: he is now wearing a suit and overcoat, and appears to have some serious power and influence on his block. Slam, however, refuses to accept the evidence that makes an insurmountable case that Ice is a drug dealer. Ice plays off Slam's concerns as one friend looking out for another. However, Slam has his doubts, but he wants to give Ice the benefit of the doubt. He hopes that Ice is working honestly for the money he has been coming into. But, it is this encounter with the well-dressed Ice that really strikes home for Slam.

In school, Slam is accused of wanting to be nothing more than a corner guy –just like Ice. Slam rebels against this idea, finding it to be pure hate from a teacher, only to later understand that it is not pure hate, but a standard of excellence held by the teachers at Latimer. Traditional attempts to get through to Slam clearly failed Parrish, so Parrish resorts to a new level to get through to Slam. Ironically, it works, even though Parrish sought discipline against Slam based on Slam's response. Goldstein is able to equate life to a basketball game for Slam, explaining that you will win or lose in life. This finally strikes home with Slam as well, and Slam commits to changing for the better. This will have resounding, positive consequences.

Discussion Question 1

How does Mr. Parrish finally get through to Slam? Was this intentional or unintentional on Parrish's part? Explain.



Discussion Question 2

What does Coach Goldstein compare to life? Why does this resonate with Slam?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Slam thank Goldstein after all this time? For what is Slam grateful? How does this affect his life?

Vocabulary

Bodacious, snatched, stalling, finesse, forensics, lecture.



Chapters 18-21

Summary

Chapter 18

Slam watches some of his tapes in the library. The librarian, Miss Fowell, explains that Parrish likes his work, despite Slam flipping out on Parrish. Slam wants to know why all the adults in the world have lectures. She explains that a lot of advice handed down to young people is ignored until it is too late. In art, Slam does a portrait of Mtisha. The day before the game with Carver arrives. Carver is the only undefeated school. If the Latimer Panthers win, it is on to the citywide Tournament of Champions. Slam, Nick, Ducky, and Jimmy hang out and get a soda before the game. Goldstein lets Slam know there will be a dozen scouts watching. Goldstein tells Slam to give them something to watch.

Chapter 19

Slam and Ice say hello before the game and trade friendly barbs at their teams. The game gets underway. It is very competitive. At the end of first half, Carver leads. The score is 31-23. The game gets even more intense, with Slam and Ice often facing one another down. Slam can see Ice is getting mad. With fifty seconds to go, Carver is up, but Slam gets Latimer ahead, and the Panthers win. Slam and Ice agree to talk by phone that night. Slam doesn't want anything to come between them. Everyone is thrilled to have won.

Chapter 20

Pops and Derek have come to see the game, and they are ecstatic. Moms has gone to visit Grandma Ellie, and she reports at home that Grandma Ellie is doing better. Mtisha invites Slam to a party at Ice's place. Slam says he will see her there. There are more than thirty people and a deejay at Ice's party. Ice's mom goes to stay at her sister's house for the night, and she is glad Ice is having the party at home. Outside, it sounds like there is a fight. Mtisha says she is not feeling well, but Slam says he has to go and find Ice. A girl is on the roof and looks like she is going to jump. Ice offers her two vials, which she takes. Slam is disgusted and horrified. Slam realizes he is a drug dealer, and they shove each other around. They end up brawling. Slams takes Mtisha home. Then, he goes home, too.

Chapter 21

When Slam gets to school the next day, he is applauded. Even Mr. Tate says he is proud of Slam. Slam does not feel great, though, because of Ice. Slam now lists Ice as one of Harlem's dead. Coach later tells the team that they will need to prepare for February's tournament. At home, Slam speaks on the phone to Mtisha, who says Ice claims he is going to give up dealing. Coach begins calling Slam, Slam. It is a sign of



respect. They go on to practice and prepare for the future. Slam thinks that if he can keep focused, he will make it.

Analysis

With the exception of three major plot points, there is resolution to the majority of the issues Slam is dealing with in the story. Slam is able to recommit to his academics and to basketball. With both of them in better condition than before, Slam realizes he will be a prime candidate for a college scout. Goldstein also tips Slam off that there will be a dozen scouts in the audience the night of the game against Carver. Slam comes to terms with Mtisha, and the two end up as something of a couple. At the same time, Slam discovers the horrific truth about Ice. Ice is a drug dealer. This results in a fist fight between the two of them.

However, despite the resolution found by Slam with respect to most parts of his life, there are three major plot points left open-ended. The first is the outcome of the championship game; the second is whether or not Ice will give up dealing; and the third is Slam's entire future. This is probably done intentionally, with the idea that the future is wide open.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Parrish so hard on Slam? How does Slam feel about this?

Discussion Question 2

What important plot points are not resolved? Why?

Discussion Question 3

What does Slam ultimately hope to do with his future? How? Will he succeed? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

Discouraged, conservative.



Characters

Greg Slam Harris

At seventeen years old, Greg “Slam” Harris is the main character and narrator of the novel “Slam!” by Walter Dean Myers. Slam knows basketball in and out. The son of Moms and Pops, and the older brother of Derek, Slam has a major crush on Mtisha, and is best friends with Ice. When the novel begins, Slam is hardened by life in Harlem. He attends the magnet school Latimer in South Bronx. Slam is antagonistic and self-absorbed, suffering in academics, though he is deep thinker. Slam is slowly drawn out of his shell by Assistant Coach Goldstein, who makes Slam realize that his future is open to any possibility, if Slam is willing to work towards it. By the end of the novel, Slam is committed to his future through academics as well as basketball, committed to pursuing Mtisha, and committed to winning the city championships.

Goldstein

The former coach of the Latimer Panthers, Goldstein is an assistant coach now following a heart-attack. Aged, elderly, and devoutly faithful, Goldstein mentors and challenges Slam to do better throughout the novel, saying that to be able to do what one loves to do is a gift from God. Goldstein is able to finally get Slam to commit to being a better person and to see that his future is wide open.

Moms

Moms is the loving and compassionate wife of Pops and the mother of Slam and Derek. She is the daughter of Grandma Ellie. She tells Slam to keep up with his grades and encourages him to realize that his future is his responsibility.

Pops

Pops is the head of the Harris household. He goes through periods of employment and turns to the bottle when unemployed. Though he is not a stellar role model, Slam and the family still love him and look to him as a guide.

Derek

At nine years old, Derek is Slam’s younger brother and the son of Moms and Pops. He accidentally loses Slam’s video camera. He later serves as the video assistant.



Grandma Ellie

Grandma Ellie is the mother of Moms and the mother-in-law of Pops. She is also the grandmother of Slam and Derek. Grandma Ellie is full of strict, yet loving, wisdom and advice. She reminds Slam that he is the only one who can make his future possible.

Coach Nipper

Coach Nipper is the head basketball coach at Latimer. He coaches the Panthers. He is very hard on Slam, wanting Slam to lose his attitude and work with the team.

Ice

Benny "Ice" Reese is the best friend of Slam. He is a senior at Carver High School. Ice is a star basketball player and is dating Bianca. Ice ultimately turns to dealing drugs to get ahead. He grows distant from Slam. The two end up fighting, and the book ends with Ice vowing to give up dealing.

Mtisha

Mtisha is the near-girlfriend of Slam. Very intelligent, Mtisha has high standards and good morals. She is shocked when Slam makes out with Kicky. Mtisha later forgives Slam and tutors him in math.

Nick

As a white kid at Latimer High, Nick is an excellent basketball player. He becomes friends with Slam. Nick is scouted by Brown for his grades and his skills on the court.



Symbols and Symbolism

Basketball

A basketball is constantly carried by Slam, as his life revolves around the sport. Slam practices, plays games, and plays pick-up games with a basketball throughout the novel, at school and at home.

Video Camera

A video camera is borrowed from school by Slam and used to work on his documentary project. The video camera is stolen while Derek is using it. Later, it turns up at Carl's pawn shop. Mtisha picks it up to return to Slam.

Math Homework

Math homework is created by Mtisha and given to Slam to complete. This is done so that Mtisha can see where Slam is struggling and target those areas to help him. The homework consists of sixty math questions and problems.

School books

School books are carried and used for class and homework by Slam. When Parrish challenges Slam in class, accusing Slam of only wanting to be a corner guy, Slam throws his school books to the floor.

Fancy clothes

Fancy clothes are purchased and worn by Ice. Ice is able to afford his fancy clothes by selling drugs.



Settings

Harlem

Harlem is the main setting for the novel "Slam!" by Walter Dean Myers. Located in New York, Harlem is the home of Slam and his family, as well as Ice and his family. Harlem is the location of Carver High School and the Harlem Hospital. It is a run-down area that is peaceful at times, but full of violence, drug use, and crime.

South Bronx

The South Bronx is an area that is mostly black, but with non-black enclaves. One such area contains the Latimer Magnet School, attended by nearly all white kids.

Latimer

Latimer High School is a magnet school that is mostly white. However, it attempts to diversify its student body. It is located in the South Bronx and is the host to a basketball team that Slam later joins.

Carver

Carver is Slam's old high school. It is located in Harlem. It is host to the best basketball team in the league, which is headed up by Ice. Carver has an undefeated season until it loses in the final seconds to Latimer.

Harlem Hospital

Located in Harlem, Harlem Hospital is where Grandma Ellie is a patient while sick. She is visited in Harlem Hospital by Slam and his family periodically. It is where Grandma Ellie tells Slam that his life is in his own hands.



Themes and Motifs

Coming of Age

Coming of age is a major theme in the novel “Slam!” by Walter Dean Myers. Coming of age includes the spiritual, emotional, moral, and personal maturation and growth of an individual, usually based on real-world experiences and life lessons. The novel primarily focuses around the coming of age of main character Slam.

When the novel begins, Slam is a stellar basketball player and a deep thinker about basketball. However, he gives little thought to anything off the court. Growing up in Harlem, he has to rely on himself to get ahead much of the time. This makes it difficult for him to work with others. He is always seeking to promote and advance himself. His attitude causes disunity on the basketball team, draws the wrath of Coach Nipper, and causes Mr. Parrish to accuse Slam in class of wanting to be nothing more than a corner guy.

Eventually, through understanding that Nick’s success is due to his grades as well as his athletic abilities and after excellent counseling from Coach Goldstein, Slam decides that he does need to pursue his academics as well as his game on the court. He befriends and works with other members of the team, helping to lead them to victory over Carver and onto the championships. His attitude improves to such a point that he apologizes to Parrish for it and thanks Goldstein for his advice and kindness. At the end of the novel, Slam’s future is entirely his own. He is a better, more thoughtful human being.

Family

Family is a major theme in the novel “Slam!” by Walter Dean Williams. Family, thematically, includes mutual love, compassion, loyalty, devotion, and emotional, spiritual, and moral support for individuals who may or may not be blood-related, but behave and operate in the form of a traditional family structure. Family is presented primarily through the Harris family and through the families of Ice and Mtisha.

For Slam, family is a beautiful and wonderful thing. Mom is devoted to her family, working to support them, as well as being a homemaker. She is a constant force of love and encouragement in Slam’s life, appealing to him to do better in school. Grandma Ellie reminds Slam that his life is in his own hands. She often receives Slam for visits at home when she gets out of the hospital.

Pops is not always employed, and he is not always sober when he is unemployed. Yet, he is still loved, respected, and cared for by his family. Slam watches out for his younger brother and his family because the streets of Harlem can become especially cruel.



Family is also seen and understood through Ice and Mtisha. Like Slam, family is the only thing they have in their chaotic lives. Mtisha's mother is very defensive of her and very condemning of Slam for his poor behavior with respect to girls. She protects her daughter when Mtisha does not want to speak to Slam. Ice's mother loves and cares for Ice to no end, though sometimes her love clouds her judgment. This is especially true given that she does not recognize he is dealing drugs and that she allows him to throw a party at their apartment.

Mentoring

Mentoring is a major theme found throughout the novel "Slam!" by Walter Dean Myers. Mentoring involves a knowledgeable, often elderly individual, guiding, teaching, and supporting a usually-younger and reckless, uncertain, or confused individual. Slam has three major mentors in the novel, with each one of them contributing to and guiding his life in some different way, shape, or form.

Slam's mother is one such mentor. She provides Slam unconditional love and encouragement without question throughout the novel. She constantly urges him to do better academically. Grandma Ellie is another such mentor. Her advice, though loving, is very objective and very strict. She impresses upon Slam the fact that his life is ultimately his responsibility. He can depend on no one to get him through life because very few people will care about his life beyond him. Both Moms and Grandma Ellie help push Slam in the right direction.

It is elderly Coach Goldstein that ultimately influences Slam the most. Goldstein, a former player and former head coach, is able to convince Slam that the ability to do what he loves to do is a gift from God. He explains that life is a game that can be won or lost, just like basketball, and so Slam had better play life with all of his might. Slam thanks Goldstein for his kindness and for his advice. With the advice of his mother, grandmother, and Goldstein taken to heart, Slam realizes his future is truly his own. He looks forward to it.

Styles

Point of View

Walter Dean Myers tells his novel “Slam!” in the first-person limited-omniscient perspective from the point of view of main character and principal protagonist, Slam. Since the novel is a story about Slam and deals with issues that much of America does not have to contend with (drive-by shootings, for example), it is best told by Slam himself. This allows the reader to experience firsthand the things Slam experiences. The reader gets an intimate glimpse at Slam’s personal life. The novel is further limited-omniscient in perspective, for it allows the reader to learn and see things only as Slam sees and learns them. This adds mystery to whether or not Ice is actually a drug dealer.

Language and Meaning

Walter Dean Myers tells his novel in language that is simple, to the point, and decidedly urban in nature. The language reflects the only high school education that Slam has so far received. The language demonstrates his limited education. Since the novel occurs in Harlem, the urban context of the language is endemic of the location, where everyday language is heavily reliant on slang and colloquialisms. The simple, contemporary language makes the novel and Slam’s narration and characterization all the more realistic and believable.

Structure

Walter Dean Myers divides his novel “Slam!” into twenty-one linear, consecutive, and chronological chapters which span the length of several months during Slam’s junior year of high school. The novel is for young adults, and Myers has a serious message to deliver in the novel. To accomplish his goals, Myers uses a straightforward and uncomplicated book structure to keep readers focused on that message, rather than external things like how the book is ordered.



Quotes

Basketball is my thing. I can hoop. Case closed.
-- Slam (Chapter 1 paragraph 1)

Importance: Slam explains very early on in the novel that his life revolves around basketball. He is an extraordinarily gifted player, and his skill in basketball is undeniable. However, Slam doesn't see much of life beyond the court.

And I'd bet two Roosevelt dimes that nobody else cares –maybe excepting your mama and that's cause she still thinks it's her job –because it ain't their lives. It's your life, do you care?
-- Grandma Ellie (Chapter 3 paragraph 27)

Importance: Slam's grandmother hands him some strict, but sagely and loving advice. Slam's life is ultimately his own, and he has to care about it, for no one else will in the end.

I'm always there," she said. "And I'll always be there."
-- Moms (Chapter 6 paragraph 114)

Importance: Slam's mother explains to Slam that she was there in the audience for his most recent game, which moves Slam deeply. However, her statement runs much deeper than attending a game. She is a loving mother.

Being good in the NBA don't mean nothing," he said. "Everybody's good in the NBA."
-- Kenny Stith (Chapter 3 paragraph 34)

Importance: Slam gets some hard-knock wisdom from Kenny Stith, a former pro player. He explains that being good is not enough to get by in the NBA or in life. In the NBA, everyone is good. It is not enough to be good.

I wasn't sure if he was using, but I knew the brother was dealing.
-- Slam (Chapter 10 paragraph 101)

Importance: As Slam sees Ice driving fancy cars and wearing fancy clothes, he comes to realize that Ice must be dealing drugs. There is no way Ice would make such good money doing anything else. It worries Slam to no end.

People who ain't into ball don't even know what it means to lose.
-- Slam (Chapter 13 paragraph 40)

Importance: In a moment of self-centered reflection, Slam looks down on those who don't play ball. He doesn't believe they know what it means to lose at anything, because they don't play basketball. Unfortunately for Slam, while others may not be playing ball, they are playing life. Slam is not.



You're in the game, Slam. You're in it whether you want to be or not. A lot of people fool themselves and say they're just not going to play. Believe me, it don't work that way.
-- Goldstein (Chapter 17 paragraph 69)

Importance: Goldstein gives Slam some incredibly important advice. Even if Slam doesn't think he is playing at life, he is. Not playing is automatically losing. Slam has to be as devoted to succeeding in life as he is to succeeding on the basketball court. Even if he thinks he will get ahead by not playing, he is still playing, in a way, and will lose.

Ice was playing me hard but I was getting to his stuff.
-- Slam (Chapter 19 paragraph 63)

Importance: Slam faces down Ice in the Latimer-Carver game at the end of the season. Slam is able to explain that his own skills have increased to such a point that Ice is having a difficult time handling Slam.

They were talking about the basketball game. Ice wasn't even in their world.
-- Slam (Chapter 5 paragraph 21)

Importance: In school the next day after a victory against Carver, everyone cheers for Slam and the team. The victory is hollow because Slam knows the truth about Ice. Everyone else is happy, but Slam is not because of Ice.

Maybe that was the way to work it. Maybe if I could get my game right, all my game, on and off the court, I would get over.
-- Slam (Chapter 21 paragraph 32)

Importance: Following a spate of life lessons, as well as sage advice from Goldstein, Moms, and Grandma Ellie, and seeing how Ice's own life has gone astray, Slam realizes that his own life is in his own hands. Slam knows that if he can get his life in order, his future is possible.