

Somewhere in the Darkness Study Guide

Somewhere in the Darkness by Walter Dean Myers

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Somewhere in the Darkness Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Pages 1-29.....	4
Pages 30-55.....	6
Pages 56-94.....	7
Pages 95-140.....	8
Pages 141-168.....	9
Characters.....	10
Objects/Places.....	13
Themes.....	15
Style.....	17
Quotes.....	19
Topics for Discussion.....	20



Plot Summary

Somewhere in the Darkness is a novel by writer Walter Dean Myers. Jimmy Little is a teenager who finds it difficult to attend school even though he is intelligent enough to graduate with honors. One day Jimmy comes home from school to find his father, Crab, waiting for him. Crab has escaped from jail and wants to take Jimmy to Arkansas where he believes an old running buddy can prove to Jimmy that Crab never killed anyone. When they arrive, Jimmy discovers that the truth does not matter as much as the search. Somewhere in the Darkness is a novel that looks closely at the relationship between a father and son that has been complicated by bad choices.

Jimmy Little goes to school for the first time in several weeks and discovers that the day has been cut short by testing. Jimmy returns home and finds a strange man waiting for him. This man claims to be Jimmy's father, Crab. Crab has been away in jail, serving time for an armored car robbery that ended in the deaths of one of the guards. Crab claims to have been released early from prison and that he must get to Chicago quickly to take a job that is required by his parole. Crab wants to take Jimmy with him.

Jimmy is reluctant to go with his father, but curiosity gets the better of him. As Jimmy and Crab drive to Chicago, Jimmy notices some oddness in Crab's behavior. Crab finally tells Jimmy that he has kidney disease and he escaped from the hospital where he was being treated out of fear that he would die without proving to Jimmy that he never killed the guard he is in jail for killing.

In Chicago, Crab takes Jimmy to meet a girlfriend of his from the past. Crab thinks this woman is going to drop everything and go to Arkansas with him, but she bails at the last minute. Instead, Crab steals some man's wallet and rents a car. Crab and Jimmy drive to Arkansas where Crab immediately sees a conjure man, hoping to learn something good about his illness. Instead, Crab learns that he is going to die.

The following day, Crab meets with the man who was most likely part of the armored car robbery for which Crab went to prison. Crab asks the man to tell Jimmy the truth, but he refuses. Crab and Jimmy walk to the creek only to learn that Crab's old friend has called the police. Crab attempts to escape, but he is caught by the police. Jimmy sits by his bed in the hospital and watches as he dies.



Pages 1-29

Pages 1-29 Summary

This novel is set in New York City where Jimmy lives with a family friend, Mama Jean. Jimmy has lived with Mama Jean since he was a small child. Jimmy's mother is dead and his father is in prison.

Mama Jean wakes Jimmy and makes him promise to make it to school before she leaves for her job. Jimmy gets up and dresses, intent on going to school. However, Jimmy has intended to go to school every day for the past few weeks, but has not gotten there. Today Jimmy runs into his downstairs neighbor, Cookie, on his way out of the building. Cookie insists on giving Jimmy an umbrella, but cannot find hers. Jimmy ends up walking to school without the umbrella.

At school, Jimmy is directed into the detention room, but he is released and sent to class without being disciplined for missing school. In class, Jimmy learns they are to be taking achievement tests. Jimmy's class is dismissed early when they complete the tests. Jimmy wants to borrow someone's notebook to catch up on schoolwork, but learns they have not been doing anything but preparing for the tests. At home, Jimmy learns from Cookie that some guy has been looking for him. Jimmy thinks it might be someone from the school about his attendance. However, when he goes to check the mail, a man approaches him and claims to be his father, Crab.

Jimmy takes the man into the apartment and leaves him in the kitchen while he goes to check some pictures of his father Mama Jean has in her room. The man catches him and asks if he is satisfied, but Jimmy is too embarrassed to answer. When Cookie knocks on the door, Crab acts strangely, hiding in the living room. Jimmy talks to Cookie and then watches out the window for Mama Jean. Mama Jean is happy to see Crab, but quickly becomes saddened when she learns that he wants to take Jimmy with him to Chicago. Crab claims he has a job waiting for him in Chicago and his parole mandates that he go as soon as possible.

Pages 1-29 Analysis

Jimmy is a young, black man growing up in New York. Jimmy does not live in the projects and is well cared for by a family friend, Mama Jean. However, Jimmy finds it difficult to get himself to school. Jimmy is intelligent, he simply feels lost at school. Instead, Jimmy wanders around New York with his friends or watches television all day long. This suggests a lack of direction, a young man who wants to do the right thing and is being given every chance to do the right thing, but he simply is not motivated to live his life as he should.

Jimmy has never really known his parents. Jimmy's mother has died and his father has been in prison since he was five, nine years now. However, when Jimmy's father

suddenly turns up, Jimmy finds himself forced into a role he has never played and does not know how to react to. Jimmy goes with the flow, trying to do what is expected of him while also trying to figure out who he is in this role.



Pages 30-55

Pages 30-55 Summary

Crab fixes Mama Jean's sink and they talk about the past. Later Mama Jean makes dinner before packing Jimmy's things. Mama Jean assures Jimmy he does not have to go and he can come back whenever he wants to, but Jimmy does not fight the situation. Jimmy goes willingly with Crab. On the way out the door, Mama Jean gives Jimmy fifty dollars in case he needs to get home on his own.

Jimmy falls asleep in the car as they drive. When he wakes, Jimmy sees that they are pulled over on the side of the road not far from a filling station. Crab is nowhere to be seen. Jimmy waits for a while and Crab finally comes from the direction of the filling station. They continue down the road for a time and finally stop for gas. Crab parks the car off to the side of the gas station before taking Jimmy for some breakfast. Crab becomes nervous when he sees a police officer looking at their car.

As they continue on their journey, Crab tells Jimmy that he was sick in jail. While in the hospital recently, Crab became afraid he would die before seeing Jimmy again, so he sneaked out of the hospital. Crab tells Jimmy that he was arrested, tried, and convicted for robbing an armored car and killing a guard. Crab says he knows who committed the crime, but that he had a toothache that day and did not participate. However, the man who killed the guard pointed to him to keep himself from getting into worse trouble. The other guy involved, Rydell, lives in Arkansas. Crab wants to go there and have Rydell tell Jimmy the truth.

Pages 30-55 Analysis

Crab behaves oddly on several occasions. Jimmy notices these oddities, but does not ask about them. Crab finally tells Jimmy that he escaped from jail because he is sick and he wants Jimmy to know the truth about the crime for which he is in jail before he dies. Crab never asks Jimmy if he really cares that his father killed the guard or not. It is important to Crab that his child knows he is not a killer, even though he openly admits that he is a thief. In fact, Jimmy suspects that Crab robbed a filling station while he was sleeping on the road to Chicago.

Now the reader knows the purpose of this trip. Crab never intended to get a job in Chicago, but hopes to go to Arkansas to prove his innocence to the only person he thinks matters anymore. The reader can also see how important this relationship is to Crab, though Jimmy is still trying to figure that fact out for himself. Jimmy is still unsure how he should feel about the man who fathered him, but has been absent from his life for the majority of it.



Pages 56-94

Pages 56-94 Summary

Crab and Jimmy arrive in Chicago and stop at a bar where Crab is apparently known by the waitress. Jimmy makes a few phone calls and then takes Jimmy to get a room in a boarding house before going to the home of Mavis, an old lover of Crab's. Mavis has a son named Frank who is a boxer. When Mavis goes to work, Crab and Jimmy go to watch Frank work out. When they leave, Crab sends Jimmy back inside to learn when Mavis will be home from work. Frank is rude to Jimmy and threatens to beat him up. Back outside, Crab tells Jimmy he has a job for the night and instructs him to return to the rooming house.

Jimmy has trouble finding his way back to the rooming house and then finds himself disgusted by the dirt and ugliness of the room. Jimmy thinks about Mama Jean and how much he misses her. Jimmy feels as though he has let Mama Jean down by not staying with her. Jimmy goes out to get some food and returns to find someone has called for him. Jimmy returns the call and learns that Crab is sick. Jimmy takes a cab to the club where Crab was supposed to play the saxophone that night before he became ill. Jimmy and Crab spend the night in the rooming house before going out for breakfast the next morning to await Mavis.

Mavis is late joining Jimmy and Crab. Crab sends Jimmy to get him some aspirin. When Jimmy returns, Crab is not where he left him. Jimmy thinks about calling Mama Jean when Crab suddenly returns. Crab takes Jimmy into a hotel where he rents a car from a rental counter, using a false name and someone else's credit card. Jimmy and Crab collect the car from the doorman and head out on the highway toward Arkansas.

Pages 56-94 Analysis

Crab and Jimmy arrive in Chicago and Crab immediately begins looking up old friends. It is immediately clear that Crab has an idea of how things should go, but quickly discovers that nothing is the way he left it nine years before. Crab expects that everything and everyone would have waited for him, but everything has changed. In fact, Crab's idea of making money playing the saxophone is stopped when he realizes that the boy he once taught to play is a better player than he ever was.

Crab and Jimmy plan to leave town with Mavis and her son, Frank. However, this does not happen and Crab ends up stealing someone's wallet to rent a car. This happens without Jimmy's knowledge, but he is old enough to understand what is going on. How Jimmy will react to it is unknown at this point because Jimmy is still unsure what his role is as Crab's son.



Pages 95-140

Pages 95-140 Summary

Jimmy and Crab have a flat tire on the way out of town, but are soon on their way. Jimmy asks questions about Crab's father and learns he was an absentee father who was something of a womanizer. Jimmy tries to picture Crab as a child, but cannot. Instead, Jimmy finds himself thinking of Mama Jean. Jimmy falls asleep and wakes the next morning to find they are parked in an industrial section of Memphis. They soon drive across the bridge into West Memphis and Arkansas.

They stop at a store and order breakfast. After they eat, Crab instructs Jimmy to call Rydell and ask if the conjure man is still around. Rydell warns Jimmy that Crab should not start any trouble with him. Back on the road, they stop again to get groceries. Jimmy calls Mama Jean when he sees that Crab is distracted. Jimmy tells Crab, but Crab does not seem upset about the call. They stop at a diner and Crab tells Jimmy how he was once not allowed to sit in this very diner. They talk to a cop and when they get back on the road they see the cop following them. Crab drives in the wrong direction for several minutes in an attempt to convince the cop they are going where he said they were. Then they double back.

Crab takes Jimmy to a place called The Quarters. They drive to a small house and Crab introduces Jimmy to a woman called Miss Mackenzie. Miss Mackenzie tells Crab where he can find the conjure man. Jimmy and Crab go to the conjure man and he feeds Crab some tea before massaging him for a few minutes. As they leave, the conjure man tells Crab that he does not know where he gets the strength to continue on. Jimmy does not understand this, but knows it is probably not good. They return to Miss Mackenzie and Jimmy can hear Crab crying in his sleep.

Pages 95-140 Analysis

Crab takes Jimmy into the Deep South and teaches him about segregation and other things Jimmy has not experienced growing up in the east. Crab is surprised by all that Jimmy does not understand, particularly bigotry and the conjure man. For the first time, this relationship takes on something like a true father and son relationship. At the same time, however, it becomes much clearer how sick Crab truly is.

Jimmy clearly still misses Mama Jean, the woman who raised him since he was a small child. Jimmy grows more confused as time passes and he does not understand exactly what is supposed to happen and what Crab wants from him. However, Jimmy does realize that Crab is frightened and he is beginning to feel some compassion for this sad man.



Pages 141-168

Pages 141-168 Summary

The next morning Crab and Jimmy wake to the heat of Arkansas. As they talk and plan their day, Jessie, Miss Mackenzie's girl, tells them that Rydell is on his way. When Rydell arrives, he tries to act tough. Crab tells him he does not want anything from him, he simply wants him to tell Jimmy that Crab was not in on the armored car heist that ended in the guard's death. Rydell accuses Crab of wanting this information in order to frame him with the police. Rydell refuses to say anything until he figures out what exactly Crab wants.

Crab and Jimmy walk to the creek. Jimmy wants to know why it is so important to Crab to have Rydell tell the truth. Jimmy says that it does not matter if Crab is not a killer because he is a petty thief. Jimmy does not see the difference between one type of crime and another. Crab suggests that they go to California together. Jimmy does not like this idea and wants to know what the goal of all this is. As they argue, Jessie comes and tells them that Rydell came back to the house with a couple of men. Crab suspects these men are cops.

Crab decides to run. Jimmy walks with Crab to the rail crossing to jump a train. However, when they arrive, Crab sees that there are too many buildings around the crossing and he is not sure he can get on a train here. Before he can decide what to do, a cop car drives up. Crab tries to run, but quickly tires and stops. Crab is sick. The police take him to a hospital where Jimmy sits with him. Crab dies after attempting to give Jimmy some final words of wisdom. After the funeral, Jimmy returns to New York and Mama Jean.

Pages 141-168 Analysis

Rydell refuses to admit to anything involving the armored car robbery because he thinks Crab has come to set him up. This frustrates Crab and makes Jimmy wonder why this is so important. Jimmy does not know what difference it makes whether his father is a killer or simply a thief. In Jimmy's mind, all crimes are the same.

Crab has failed to create the relationship with his son he intended to make and to clear his name of murder. When Crab dies, he has not accomplished what he set out to do. At the same time, Jimmy feels as though he has lost a father without truly knowing anything about him. Life goes back to normal for Jimmy, but the reader feels as though something fundamental has changed. Perhaps Jimmy will live a better life for having met his father. If this is true, at least this ordeal has some meaning.



Characters

Jimmy Little

Jimmy Little is a fourteen year old boy who is very intelligent, but he has trouble concentrating in school. Jimmy often does not go to school, but instead he spends time with friends or watches television all day. However, Jimmy's guardian, Mama Jean, wants him to graduate from school so she pushes him to go. As the novel begins, Jimmy finds himself wrestling with the guilt of hurting Mama Jean by not going to school.

Jimmy has never known his father. Crab Little has been in jail since Jimmy was five. In fact, Jimmy lived with Mama Jean even before Crab went to jail because the older man was not equipped to deal with a child after his wife's death. When Crab suddenly shows up outside Jimmy's apartment, he does not know how to deal with him. Jimmy goes on a cross country trip with Crab, but does not understand why Crab wants him there or what he expects.

Crab Little

Crab Little is a black man who was sent to prison for a crime he did not commit. Crab is accused of killing a guard during the robbery of an armored truck, but Crab refused to go on that heist because of a tooth ache. One of the robbers pointed a finger at Crab, however, and he could not fight this man's testimony.

Crab has become ill in prison and is afraid he will die before having the chance to prove to his only child that he did not commit the crime. Crab escapes and takes Jimmy to Arkansas where he hopes to prove the truth to him. However, this does not happen. Instead, Jimmy watches Crab die and returns home, unsure if he has learned anything from his experiences.

Mama Jean

Mama Jean is a middle aged woman who babysits for a living. Mama Jean is a family friend of the Littles and has taken custody of Jimmy since he was a small child. When Crab arrives at their apartment and demands that he be allowed to take Jimmy, Mama Jean does not fight him. However, it is clear to the reader that Mama Jean does not want Jimmy to go. In fact, Mama Jean takes each opportunity she has to reassure Jimmy he can always come back to her if he wants.

Mavis

Mavis is a young woman who was Crab's lover before he went to jail nine years ago. When Crab escapes from prison, he goes to Chicago in the hopes of getting back together with Mavis. However, Mavis refuses to go to Arkansas with Crab because she does not want to give up everything she has worked for in Chicago.

Young Frank

Frank is Mavis' son. Frank is a little older than Jimmy and is fixated on boxing. Frank appears to want to impress Crab when they watch him box. However, when Jimmy returns to speak to Frank alone, Frank is rude to him and threatens to beat him up. Jimmy proves his bravery by facing off with Frank, but later wonders what might have happened in a fight between them. Crab seems to think Jimmy could not have won but encourages him to stand up to him just the same. This confuses Jimmy, leaving him wondering if Crab wants him to get hurt.

Miss Mackenzie

Miss Mackenzie is an elderly woman in Arkansas who takes Crab and Jimmy in as soon as they arrive. Miss Mackenzie does not appear to be related to the Littles, but is a close friend to the family, something like Mama Jean. In the end Miss Mackenzie delays the inevitable by warning Crab that Rydell has returned to the house with the police.

Conjure Man

The Conjure man is something of a medicine man who treats the soul as well as the body. The conjure man gives Crab some tea and informs him that he is dying, but encourages him to care for himself by surrounding himself with family and drinking lots of natural teas.

Rydell

Rydell is an old running buddy of Crab's. Years before, Rydell came to Crab with the idea of robbing an armored truck. However, Crab has a toothache and cannot take part in the robbery. Crab does not know what happened during the robbery, but suspects that Rydell took part in it with Frank and that Frank killed the guard who died. Crab goes to jail for this crime and comes to Arkansas with the hope that Rydell will tell Jimmy the truth about that day.

Jessie

Jessie is a girl who lives with Miss Mackenzie. Jessie is a beautiful young girl to whom Jimmy is strongly attracted. However, Jimmy never acts on these feelings. Jessie does chores for Miss Mackenzie and warns Crab and Jimmy when Rydell returns to the house with the police.

Older Frank

Frank is an old running buddy of Crab's. Frank is a part of the armored car robbery. Crab suspects that Frank shot the guard because Frank tells the police that Crab was with him and that Crab shot the guard. Crab thinks that Frank pointed a finger at Crab to protect himself. Frank got only a few months in jail for the robbery and is now dead, which is why Crab decides to go to Rydell for the truth.



Objects/Places

Saxophone

Crab played the saxophone in prison. When Crab arrives in Chicago he tries to get a gig playing sax, but chickens out when he realizes a kid he taught to play is better than him now.

Aspirin

Crab takes lots of aspirin for his sore back.

Hidden Money

Jimmy hides fifty dollars in his sock that Mama Jean gave him should he need to get home quickly.

Stolen Car

Crab takes Jimmy out of New York City in a car that Jimmy later comes to believe was stolen.

Rental Car

Crab rents a car with a stolen credit card. It is this car that takes Jimmy and Crab to Arkansas.

Payphone

Jimmy calls Mama Jean on a payphone outside a store in Arkansas to let her know he is okay.

Diner

Crab takes Jimmy to a diner in Arkansas where he was once forbidden to sit.

Rooming House

Jimmy and Crab stay in a rooming house in Chicago.



Hospital

Crab is taken to the hospital when he is caught by the police. Crab dies in the hospital of kidney disease.

New York City

Jimmy lives in New York City with a family friend, Mama Jean.

Chicago

Crab goes to Chicago first in order to reconnect with Mavis, an old girlfriend.

Arkansas

Crab grew up in Arkansas and he takes Jimmy there because he believes the only man who can tell the truth about the armored car robbery is there.



Themes

Father-Son Relationships

The plot of this novel centers around the relationship between Crab and Jimmy Little. Crab is Jimmy's father, but he has been in jail most of Jimmy's childhood. Suddenly Crab has decided he needs to prove to his child that he is a good person who would never murder anyone. Crab escapes jail and takes his son to Arkansas so that one of his old criminal partners can tell Jimmy the truth.

The trip across country is a complicated one because of the odd relationship between father and son. Jimmy does not know what his role is in this relationship and Crab has had dreams of what this relationship should be and is disappointed when it does not prove to be what he has always thought it would be. These two men cannot figure out how to be with one another and the relationship eventually explodes in disagreement.

Father-son relationships are as different as the people in them. In this book, this relationship is there through blood, but not through interaction. It is difficult for these two people to figure out what and who they are, but in the end there is still the affection that is inherent in this type of relationship.

Degrees of Criminal Activity

Crab wants to prove to Jimmy that he never committed murder. Crab is not ashamed to tell his son that he has committed robbery. However, in Crab's mind there is a difference between theft and murder. For this reason, Crab wants Rydell to tell Jimmy that Crab did not kill an armored car guard.

Jimmy does not understand why it is so important for Rydell to tell him the truth. Jimmy tells Crab that there is little difference between theft and murder because both are wrong. Mama Jean has taught Jimmy well, but Crab continues to believe that there is a difference between these things.

In the end, Jimmy comes to realize that his father only wanted him to love and respect him. The degree of criminal activity was only about the level of respect Crab wants from his only child. Jimmy finds a way to give some of this to Crab before his death while still fighting his own confusion.

Family

This novel discusses family in the relationship between Jimmy and Crab. However, this novel also explores other types of relationships. For example, this novel explores the relationship between Jimmy and Mama Jean. Mama Jean is not related to Jimmy, but she has been the only constant in Jimmy's life, the only person who cares how he lives



his life. At the same time, the reader meets Miss Mackenzie, a woman who opens her home and heart to Crab without question but does not appear to be related to him.

Family can be defined in many ways. In this novel, the blood shared among family members does not appear to matter. Crab is a blood relative, but Jimmy is better with Mama Jean. This is a relationship that takes little thought, little struggle, where the relationship between Jimmy and Crab is difficult and confusing. Therefore, the author seems to be saying that blood is not necessary to make a family.



Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the third person point of view. Most of the narration is focused on Jimmy Little, the fourteen year old main character of the novel. The point of view develops an interesting relationship between the reader and Jimmy Little. However, there is some distance between Jimmy and the reader that seems to suggest to the reader that no one can ever truly understand another human being.

The point of view of this novel works with the novel because it fits with the plot of the novel. The author seems to focus on a great deal of unimportant details in his plot that have little to do with Jimmy or the events taking place in his life. This focus pulls the reader back from Jimmy, denting the attempt at intimacy between reader and character that is so important in novels of this type. However, the reader still cares what happens to Jimmy, though they are not disappointed by the mediocre end.

Setting

The novel begins in a small section of New York City where Jimmy lives with Mama Jean. The apartment where they live is well maintained and clean, but the superintendent is not as meticulous as he should be and the neighbor appears to be less than ideal. When Crab comes, he takes Jimmy to Chicago where they visit several neighborhoods similar to the one where Mama Jean lives, and then travel to Arkansas where the neighborhood is poor and a clear example of the lingering inequality of the south.

The setting of this novel is important to the plot because the novel is about a young black boy whose father has been in prison most of his life. If the novel were to have begun in an upper class neighborhood, the main character would be a completely different person from the one the reader gets to know in Jimmy. Not only this, but the setting seems to explain for the reader the reasons why Crab went to jail and where Jimmy might find himself if he does not make different choices than his father made at his age.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is a simple English that is filled with the slang one might expect characters of this type to speak. For example, Jimmy often drops certain pronouns and articles in his speech, speaking as he might on the streets of New York City. At the same time, Crab uses some slang that he must have picked up in prison.

The language of the novel fits the characters of the novel. The slang can be difficult at times for the reader, but the rest of the language fits well with the intended audience of



the book. The book is filled with simple English, language that the reader can understand and that does not include difficult phrases in a foreign language or anything else a young reader might not comprehend. For this reason, the language of the novel fits the plot.

Structure

The novel is not divided into parts of chapters. In fact, it is written with few breaks at all. Written in both exposition and dialogue, the author shows the story to the reader rather than telling it. This is a linear story line, but there are several sections in which the main character tells stories that have happened in the past.

There is one main plot and several subplots. The main plot follows Jimmy as he travels cross country with the father he has never really known. One subplot follows Crab's attempts to force his old buddy Rydell to tell Jimmy the truth about the crime for which he was convicted. Another subplot deals with the relationship between Jimmy and his guardian Mama Jean. All the plots come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

"When they got home Mama Jean had lectured him on how important reading and writing were. He hadn't answered, just listened. There was nothing to say; he knew she was right." Page 3

"Jimmy was already late for school. But he was trying to figure out a strategy." Page 12

"'I'm your father,' the man replied." Page 19

"He had often wondered what it would be like to have a father, like some kids." Page 39

"Jimmy tried to think what the man Crab was talking about looked like, but he couldn't think clearly. He kept asking himself why he was there." Page 51

"On the way out Jimmy thought about how Crab had put his arm around Frank. He did it like they had something they knew, like they were friends or something." Page 67

"Mama Jean had been all that he thought he needed. Companion and friend, mother and father." Page 74

"Mama Jean would tell him to do things, but the way she would tell him, putting her hand on his arm or rubbing his shoulder, it was almost as if she were asking him." Page 88

"In front of him, somewhere in the darkness, lay Arkansas." Page 103

"There were houses that looked like the old houses he had seen in picture books. In the books the houses were supposed to be interesting, or pretty to look at. But these houses had people living in them, men who stood on the front porches with their hands in their pockets." Page 116

"'That why you brought me down here?' Jimmy said. 'All the way from Mama Jean's? So you can get some meaning to your life?'" Page 155

"It wouldn't have been bad if it had been a laugh, if Crab had just found again how young Jimmy was, and had laughed, as best he could, before death caught him unaware. It would have been better if it had been a smile." Page 167

Topics for Discussion

Who is Jimmy? Why does Jimmy have trouble going to school? Why did a school psychologist once interview Jimmy? What did he learn about Jimmy? Why does Jimmy decide to go to school this day? What happens there? Why does Jimmy leave early? What does he find when he returns home?

Who is Crab? Why is he at Jimmy's apartment? What does he want from Jimmy? When was the last time Crab saw Jimmy? Why has he been in jail? What does he plan to do with Jimmy? For what reason? How did Crab get out of jail? What story does he tell Mama Jean? Is it true? When does the reader learn the truth about Crab?

Why does Crab take Jimmy to Chicago? What do they do there? Why does Crab become ill there? Why does Jimmy have to rescue him? Who does Jimmy meet in Chicago? Who are these people? How do these people treat Jimmy? Why? What does Jimmy buy for Crab in Chicago? For what reason? What might this foreshadow in the plot?

How does Crab get a new car in Chicago? What does Jimmy think about how Crab got the car? What does Crab tell Jimmy as they travel to Arkansas? Why does Jimmy want to know this information? What does this information tell the reader about Crab and his crimes?

Why does a cop follow Jimmy and Crab in Arkansas? What does Crab do about it? Where do Crab and Jimmy go when they first arrive in Arkansas? What does Crab teach Jimmy about the Deep South? Why does Jimmy not know this information already? Is Crab a good father in teaching these things to Jimmy? Who else might have taught Jimmy these things?

What is a conjure man? Why does Crab go to see the conjure man? What does the conjure man tell Crab? Does this make Crab happy or sad? What does Jimmy think this information means? Why does Jimmy think Crab cries in his sleep? Does Jimmy care about what might happen to Crab in the future? For what reason?

Why does Rydell refuse to tell the truth about the armored car robbery? What does Rydell think Crab wants from him? What does Crab really want? What does Jimmy say about Crab's desire to have Rydell tell the truth? Why does Jimmy argue with Crab? Why does Jimmy not want to go to California with Crab? What does this say about their relationship?