

There Are No Children Here Study Guide

There Are No Children Here by Alex Kotlowitz

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Plot Summary

There Are No Children Here by Alex Kotlowitz chronicles the true story of two brothers coming of age in the Henry Horner public housing project in Chicago over a two year period. Lafayette and Pharoah Rivers, their mother and siblings struggle to survive gun battles, gang influences, overzealous police officers, and overburdened and mismanaged bureaucracies to simply survive.

Lafayette and Pharoah Rivers are eleven and nine years old when the story begins in the summer of 1987. They live with their mother LaJoe and six siblings, though the three oldest come and go. Their father Paul is rarely around due to his drug habit. Summer is the most dangerous season as shootings are constant. The family's safe place to avoid stray bullets is in the narrow hallway of their apartment. Lafayette is wary of gangs and does his best to avoid them. The Conservative Vice Lords is the local gang headed by Jimmy Lee, who is later charged with gun and drug possession and sentenced to thirty years in prison. Lafayette is friends with a fifteen year-old nicknamed Bird Leg who is obsessed with dogs. In August, the Vice Lords and their rivals reach a truce. Regardless, Bird Leg is shot to death in an altercation with rival gang members. At Bird Leg's funeral, Lafayette is numb and wonders if he will make it to adulthood. The stress of a violent summer also affects Pharoah. He develops a severe stutter he can barely control and is easily startled by loud noises.

Pharoah begins fourth grade with a teacher who recognizes his skills in writing and spelling. Pharoah is so comfortable in the classroom that he stutters less and communicates more openly. He befriends an older boy named Rickey. Rickey is a bully and troublemaker but treats Pharoah like a younger brother and feels the need to protect him. Lafayette is against this friendship at first but in time also becomes Rickey's friend. By winter, the Rivers' home overflows as the older children and their partners and babies move in. As many as thirteen people occupy the apartment. LaJoe becomes increasingly short-tempered. To add to the stress, her third child, Terrence, is arrested for armed robbery and the Department of Public Aid cuts off her benefits as they claim she has been "double dipping" into the system, which is not the case. LaJoe leans on family and friends for help and joins an all-night women's card game to make some cash. Many difficult months later, her benefits are reinstated.

Pharoah is selected to be part of the school spelling bee contest. He works diligently to prepare but is concerned about his stutter. During the competition the stutter takes over after the first few rounds and Pharoah is eliminated. He is distraught but plans to try harder next year. The following year after months of practice he is far more confident and wins second place. He is also chosen to participate in a summer school program at the University of Illinois. He is focused on the future but worries as his cousin Dawn graduated high school but is still in the projects. He wonders if having an education is enough to get out.

Lafayette begins to have some run-ins with the law. He and Rickey are caught shoplifting but the manager decides not to press charges. To make some spending



money, Lafayette and Pharoah go to the Chicago Stadium during a game to offer to protect parked cars for a few dollars. Lafayette helps a parking lot attendant wave in cars. A policeman confronts him and pushes him to the ground, telling him white people do not have money to give to "niggers". For weeks Lafayette and Pharoah avoid the stadium. Lafayette becomes increasingly wary of authority figures. One of Lafayette's favorite friends is Craig Davis. He is a rare young man as he graduates high school, is not in a gang, has a job, and aspires to become a radio deejay. He is deejay for many local community parties. One evening on the way to pick up stereo equipment, Craig is shot by a white police officer who suspects him of being a gang member and gun runner. Lafayette is devastated by his death and it has a profound impact on him. He becomes depressed, numb, and bitter. He feels powerless about his life, believing he will be killed or end up in prison no matter what he does. Meanwhile, Terrence is offered a plea bargain of eight years in prison. LaJoe convinces him to take the offer because if the case goes to court he could end up with a much longer sentence. She is so tense about the situation she finally snaps and screams at a drug addict who has been coming on to her in recent weeks. After he threatens her, LaJoe's oldest son beats him up. For a moment, LaJoe contemplates running away with the five younger children, but she has nowhere to go.

After years of corruption and mismanagement, the CHA gets a new leader named Vincent Lane. He knows he will have to deal with the CHA's terrible reputation and mismanagement issues but the reality is worse than he imagined. His first act is to conduct building sweeps to try to get rid of the gangs. Housing managers soon become targets of violence. Despite various efforts, the shooting continues. Nevertheless improvements eventually appear at Horner. Much needed cleanups and repairs are made and anti-drug and gang programs crop up.

Lafayette is arrested for allegedly breaking into a truck near the stadium and taking some goods, along with four other boys. Lafayette claims he did not know the boys and was just walking by when the incident happened. LaJoe goes with Lafayette to the detention center for his initial hearing and, after hours of waiting and poor treatment, they are given a court date in September. Lafayette takes his anger and rage out on his father. He accuses Paul of being a drug addict and a failure. Paul backs down from the fight realizing that drugs have damaged his relationship with his children and he has let his family down. LaJoe goes with Lafayette to his court hearing. The public defender can only spend a few minutes with the accused boys but is sure she can get most of them off as there are no witnesses to the actual crime and questionable police accounts. However, the judge thinks differently and finds them guilty. Lafayette is given a year's probation and is required to perform a hundred hours of community service at the Boys Club.

With help from the author, both brothers get into a strict parochial school named Providence-St. Mel. A year later Pharoah is thriving at the school but Lafayette has goes back to public school as he finds the work too challenging. He also finds it hard to avoid the lure of the streets and is caught smoking marijuana. He promises his mother he will do better. In June 1990 Lafayette, now fifteen, graduates from eighth grade. He plans to attend a parochial school that isn't as academically rigorous as Providence-St. Mel. One



thing that hasn't changed in Horner is the level of violence. LaJo tries to move but is ripped off in a scam and loses an eighty dollar deposit. She is depressed and humiliated as the family has been bragging about the move. The future looks uncertain for the Rivers as they are forced to remain in the same environment. At least the brothers are alive and still at home and Pharoah offers a spark of hope for the future.



Summer 1987, Chapter 1

Summer 1987, Chapter 1 Summary

There Are No Children Here by Alex Kotlowitz chronicles the true story of two brothers growing up in the Henry Horner projects of Chicago over a two year period. Set in the Horner Homes public housing district of Chicago, Lafayette and Pharoah Rivers, their mother and siblings struggle to survive gun battles, gang influences, over-zealous police officers, and overburdened and mismanaged bureaucracies to simply survive.

The story begins in the summer of 1987. Nine year old Pharoah and his brother Lafayette, twelve, venture towards the railroad tracks that run from Chicago's west side to the western suburbs and downtown Chicago. They join six friends and pair up. Pharoah partners with his younger cousin Leonard Anderson, nicknamed Porkchop, a shy but nervous boy. Lafayette partners with his good friend James Howard whom he grew up with in the same building in the Henry Horner projects. Each pair of boys uses a crowbar to dig around the tracks in search of garter snakes to keep as pets. Their search proves fruitless. Pharoah and Porkchop wander off and find a ten-foot high stack of worn car tires. They scramble in and out of the rubber tires and bounce on them with wild abandon. Suddenly, a sparrow flies near with a threatening screech, making Pharoah scream with fear and delight.

Meanwhile, James plays in an empty box car at one end of the side tracks. Lafayette tries to follow when a friend shouts that a train is coming. The boys scramble into hiding in fear, having heard the suburban commuters might shoot at them through the windows for trespassing on the tracks. The same fears reverberate inside the train as commuters have heard rumors that snipers in this ill-fated neighborhood might shoot at them. After the train passes without incident, most of the boys scramble into the box car. Being too small to climb up, Pharoah crouches in some weeds and pulls on vegetation, deep in thought as he takes in the smell of the wildflowers and the tranquility of the spot. As the sun sets none of the boys want to leave but they know the area is too dangerous at night so begin their short trek home.

Summer 1987, Chapter 1 Analysis

The two main characters, Pharoah and Lafayette, are introduced. Lafayette is the older, self-assured brother while Pharoah is more contemplative and quiet. For Pharoah, the experience at the railroad tracks is extraordinary. He admires the radically different views, comparing the Chicago city skyline to his dull neighborhood of red brick buildings and a Baptist church he has heard is over a century old and once a stopping place on the Underground Railroad. He is enraptured with the sense of tranquility and small eruptions of nature near the tracks, which are in stark contrast to his daily environment.



When a train passes there is a great deal of fear - fear from the boys that the suburban commuters will shoot them for trespassing and fear from the commuters that snipers in this area will target them. As the author points out, the real enemy fueling these rumors is the unknown. By the end of the chapter there is a sense of sadness amongst the boys who must leave this carefree, exploratory place to return to the projects.



Summer 1987, Chapter 2

Summer 1987, Chapter 2 Summary

This chapter provides a background on Pharoah and Lafeyette's family and environment. It describes the history of the Governor Henry Horner Homes, which the children call "Hornets," the projects, or "jects." The neighborhood was once one of the wealthiest areas in Chicago until Jane Adam's renowned Hull House signaled the beginning of the demise. Over the next century the diverse middle class population fled to the suburbs while businesses and manufacturing jobs moved and employment opportunities dwindled. Many African American migrated to the neighborhood from the South in the 1940s and before long the area was predominantly black and poor. By 1987, a few financially impoverished clinics and youth centers exist but are ill-equipped to cope with the intense poverty, drugs, gang violence, and health and educational needs of the residents. There are few general services such as stores or banks. There is a currency exchange but they charge a hefty fee to cash welfare checks.

Pharoah and Lafeyette's thirty-five year old mother LaJoe is introduced. She has eight children including four-year old triplets and three older children who come and go as they are on drugs or in and out of jail. Paul, her husband of seventeen years, is rarely home. LaJoy is a generous, loving person and hopes her younger children will succeed in life, but she lives in constant fear for their safety and with good reason. On Lafeyette's twelfth birthday in June, he and his younger cousin Dede are playing outside when a gang battle erupts. Lafeyette protects his cousin by shielding her on the ground, as he would protect any of his younger siblings.

Three days after Lafeyette's birthday, another gang battle ensues. Lafeyette is home early from school and hides on the floor of his first-story apartment with his mother and the triplets. He worries about Pharoah. When school gets out, the children run to their homes in the middle of the gun battle. Lafeyette wants to go out to find his brother but LaJoe refuses. They watch as Pharoah makes his way to a friend's apartment, ducking behind trees all the way. The police think the firefight is aimed at them and take cover. Finally, the battle ends and amazingly no one is hurt. When a reporter calls the police station the next day, they say they have no record of a shootout.

Summer 1987, Chapter 2 Analysis

Chapter two provides information on Pharoah and Lafeyette's impoverished, gang and drug-ridden neighborhood, their family dynamics, and their daily struggles. Many themes are touched on such as the disparity of wealth, isolation and neglect, the lack of protection for those who need it most, the burden and cycle of poverty, hopelessness, racism, and other life and death issues.

Lafayette clearly fills the role of protector as the oldest son at home, demonstrated as he physically shields his cousin in gunfire and wants to rescue Pharoah in the following shootout . Pharoah, the introspective, shy brother, constantly tries to please adults to feel assured he is loved. LaJoe is emotionally torn by what so many mothers in poverty face - the slim dream that her children will make it out of the neighborhood and succeed and the fear that they will die before they reach adulthood.



Summer 1987, Chapter 3

Summer 1987, Chapter 3 Summary

LaJoe remembers the day she moved into the Henry Horner Homes at the age of four with her parents and siblings. The projects were new with some still under construction, so she was excited by the richness of the brand new bricks and clean windows. The homes were from seven to fifteen stories high and covered eight blocks. As the first family to move into their building of sixty-five apartments, it was quiet and tranquil. The project was one of many controversial publicly financed high rise housing projects sprouting in cities across the nation, typically built on the edge of existing slums. As with most public high rises, the Henry Horner homes were built with breezeways rather than walled hallways so that elevator cables constantly froze in the winter. The apartment walls were built with cinderblock and with medicine cabinets joined from one apartment to the next so tenants could be robbed or assaulted if the cabinets were yanked out.

LaJoe and her family moved into a five bedroom apartment on the first floor, which the children loved as they could climb in and out of the windows. In the first few years, LaJoe and her siblings thrived between building parties, ample social agencies, a new Boys Club, and a strong sense of community. It was a time of hope and pride, but hopes deteriorated with the buildings. LaJoe's older sister was murdered, her brother died of a heart attack on hearing the news, another died of bone cancer, and her parents moved out.

Now, LaJoe is only down the hall from where she used to live, the housing project now holding sixth thousand tenants of which four thousand are children. It is a hot, early July day as Lafeyette, Pharoah and LaJoe huddle with the twins in the apartment's narrow hallway to avoid the bullets popping outside. Once the shooting stops, LaJoe cleans, a cathartic habit following tense moments. With eight people living in the apartment and cockroaches scrambling around, LaJoe feels that cleaning is an almost pointless task as she could never keep up with the constant disarray, dilapidating appliances and furniture, and immense clutter.

Later, James tries to convince Lafeyette to play basketball with other children in the cement playground area, but Lafeyette doesn't want to in case they try to recruit him into a gang. The previous week teen gang members asked him to stand watch, which made him nervous. His mother threatened them she would call the police if they didn't stay away from Lafeyette. Instead of basketball, Lafeyette, James, and a few other boys idle on broken metal benches while Pharoah and Porkchop pitch pennies nearby. James brags about how one day he will have his own condominium in the Chicago suburb of Calumet where you can "sit outside all night and nothing would happen." Lafeyette holds his hands four feet above the ground to describe the height of the flowers in Calumet. The boys make wishes. James wishes that good and bad people could be separated and Lafeyette wishes to go to heaven. Pharoah wishes there were no gangbangers and an argument ensues as to whether or not a place even exists



without gangbangers. The chapter ends with grim statistics about the number of beatings, shootings, stabbings, and confiscated drugs and guns found at Horner by the season's end.

Summer 1987, Chapter 3 Analysis

This chapter provides more insight into historical decline of the Horner Homes with the physical decay of the buildings paralleling the general decay of the neighborhood. It offers political insights into the mishaps of public high rise developments and the harsh real-life consequences for the tenants, the majority of which are children. LaJoe's memories of the building when it was brand new are a harsh cry from its present state as there is minimal funding for maintenance and repairs and the decaying plumbing and appliances only add to the misery of each day.

The family hides from yet another gang battle that adds to their frustrations in the summer heat. The boys fantasize about life outside of the projects where flowers are four feet tall and it is safe at night. They also see the violence around them in stark terms - bad people and good people. Lafayette is determined not to be one of the bad, a gangbanger, and expresses real concerns about being seduced or forced to join. The statistics on the neighborhood violence are a concrete reminder that these children's lives are at serious risk.



Summer 1987, Chapter 4

Summer 1987, Chapter 4 Summary

One day in mid-July, a caravan of cars pulls up across the street from the Rivers'. A young man, Jimmie Lee, emerges with bodyguards and is surrounded by fawning teenagers. Lee overhears a drunk shouting at his teenage daughter and calling her a bitch. He walks over and slugs the man, telling him not to disrespect children or call his daughter a bitch. Lafayette, Pharoah and their friends know to stay away from Jimmy Lee, head of a drug gang called the Conservative Vice Lords whose members control Henry Horner. Residents are too afraid to report any of Lee's activities for fear of reprisal and many actually respect him. In contradiction to his brutal career, Lee occasionally helps out families financially and because of his love for children, won't let them join his gang and even warns them to stay away from drugs and gangs. He doesn't do drugs himself, respects women, and has been married to the same woman for almost twenty years, making him somewhat of a role model in a world of absent fathers. The chapter continues with a history and structure of Chicago gangs and the powerful force they have become, influencing politics as well as the lives of the residents in their neighborhoods.

Lafayette is ten years old the first time he sees a gang member killed at the beginning of Henry Horner's brutal drug wars when Jimmy Lee and his gang fight for control of the area against the Disciples. A few weeks later, Lafayette and Pharoah witness a girl skipping rope get shot in the leg during a gun battle. Lafayette dashes inside with the triplets while Pharoah and Porkchop run and hide in the garbage in a panic. As the gang wars escalate over the years, Lafayette and Pharoah, like the other residents, speak of the "death train" that drives through their community.

Summer 1987, Chapter 4 Analysis

This chapter further highlights the violence that is part of daily life for the residents of Horner Home and the ruthless or inert power bases that control their activities. Lafayette and Pharoah have deeply scarring memories of gang violence and know the unspoken rules of safety such as how to duck and hide and who to avoid. Jimmy Lee represents supreme power in their neighborhood and although he is ruthless, he is more effective than the police when it comes to protection. His contradictory character, respect of women and love of children win him loyalty and reverence in the community. His reputation emphasizes the ineffectiveness of established law and order in impoverished areas like Horner Home. The history of the gangs also reveals that this is a long standing part of the culture not likely to change or improve any time soon as all efforts to rid neighborhoods of gangs over the years essentially fail. The cycle of gang strength continues through the cycle of poverty with young teenagers being constantly recruited in the streets or from jails with the promise of wealth and a sense of power in a powerless world.



Summer 1987, Chapter 5

Summer 1987, Chapter 5 Summary

Lafayette is friends with an older boy named Calvin Robinson, nicknamed Bird Leg, who loves dogs. While Bird Leg is teased for this obsession, younger kids like Lafayette appreciate it. Lafayette often joins Bird Leg to hunt for German shepherds, mutts, and pit bulls in the back yards of Hispanic and white neighborhoods north of the Horner Homes. While the dogs growl and bark at Lafayette and other boys, they warm up to Bird Leg who unchains them and brings them home. Bird Leg has an assortment of stolen and stray dogs he keeps in an abandoned garage near Lafayette's building. A few nights a week, Bird Leg rummages through trash bins behind a Kentucky Fried Chicken to find leftover meals for his dogs. When Bird Leg becomes affiliated with the Vice Lords, he and Lafayette grow apart. One day Bird Leg is shot, so his mother moves him further north but he keeps returning to Horner to visit friends.

In August of 1988, the Vice Lords and their rivals reach a truce. Regardless, Bird Leg is shot in the shoulder by a rival gang. He tells his brother if he dies to bury him in his white jogging suit. The next evening he returns to Horner. He gets into an altercation with Disciple gang members and is shot in the chest. He soon dies, only fifteen years old. Lafayette hears about the shooting from a friend but decides not to go to the crime scene, already having seen enough death in his life. Within minutes of Bird Leg's death, Jimmy Lee steps out and assembles a band of young rebels to seek revenge which results in the deaths of many Disciples in the weeks to come.

Lafayette, James, and Pharoah attend the open casket funeral service. They gather around Bird Leg, who is dressed in his white jogging suit. It is unbearably hot in the small church, packed with about 150 family, friends, and gang associates. Bird Leg's sister keeps screaming that he is not dead, a moment that Pharoah will vividly recall. Bird Leg's friend, Carla, speaks positively of him but with an underlying sense that none of his peers may make it to eighteen. Pharoah is moved by the ceremony, especially when the congregation sings "Lean on Me". He begins to cry and, as happens to him in stressful moments, develops a painful headache. James also cries but Lafayette just stares vacantly. As the congregation passes Bird Leg on the way out the gang members give him their hand signal. Once outside the church, James makes the point that they will die one way or another, either "by killing or plain out." He and Lafayette agree that they would prefer to die plain out.

Summer 1987, Chapter 5 Analysis

Bird Leg is a unique child with his passion and connection to the canine world. The dogs provide him with the warm, unconditional love that is lacking in his environment. This need to feel loved is reflected in his willingness to be recruited by the Vice Lord gangs. Even though his mother moves him to a safer neighborhood, the allure of old friends



and gang affiliation makes him return to Horner Home. His death is one of a long summer string of young fatalities but it is personal for Lafayette because of their friendship. Lafayette's inability to cry at the funeral, unlike James and Pharoah, shows he is becoming emotionally numb to the brutalities in his life. The stress shows itself physically in Pharoah through excruciating headaches. During the sermon, Bird Leg's friend Carla reiterates what many children of Horner Home fear - that they will not survive childhood. Lafayette and James echo this fear after the funeral, both hoping desperately to die of natural causes. There is a sense of hopelessness in their wishful thinking.



Summer 1987, Chapter 6

Summer 1987, Chapter 6 Summary

Pharoah begs Lafayette to take him to the railroad tracks to escape the heat and horrors of Horner Home. He keeps thinking of the momentary peace of mind he felt at the tracks when they were hunting for snakes. The summer violence has taken its toll on Pharoah. His once almost indiscernible stutter is becoming increasingly obvious. Sometimes the words tangle in his throat so badly he can't speak at all and must write down his thoughts. Embarrassed with inability to communicate, he mostly keeps to himself or hangs out with his cousin Porkchop. LaJoe worries about his vulnerability as he is easily startled by any loud noise and has fainted at the sounds of gunfire.

Earlier in the summer Lafayette and James agree to take Pharoah to the tracks but are attacked in the breezeway by a gang of teenagers and are too shaken up. The next day they hear someone lost his legs when run over by a train while hunting for snakes. Now, Lafayette refuses to take his brother because he thinks it is unsafe. Lafayette also changes as a result of the summer's violence and his overwhelming sense of responsibility for his younger siblings. He is especially haunted by Bird Leg's death but refuses to speak about it to his mother or express any of his feelings. His face is a blank slate and he trusts almost no one. He refuses to take Pharoah back to the tracks knowing it might invite trouble.

Summer 1987, Chapter 6 Analysis

This short chapter explores the emotional and physical effects of the violent summer on the two brothers. Pharoah's changes are mostly physical, such as stuttering and fainting and extreme responses to loud noises. As a result he is becoming more isolated and withdrawn. Lafayette is internalizing his stress as if discussing violence and death will only invite more of it. He is becoming numb, distrustful, and extremely cautious, hiding his emotions behind a mask devoid of expression.



Fall 1987 - Spring 1988, Chapter 7

Fall 1987 - Spring 1988, Chapter 7 Summary

A gang truce allows neighbors to gather and commune in a narrow parking lot behind the Rivers' building. LaJoe hangs out with her childhood friend Rochelle. Pharoah is with them as a teacher strike lingers for weeks. The teachers are demanding a pay raise and reduction of the number of students in the classroom. Their salaries are low and the board is proposing trimming three days a year to save money, which would reduce salaries even more. Pharoah loves school and can't wait to go back. It is a safe place where he can excel without fear. The summer has gone on too long already. Another friend of the family is shot but Lafayette and Pharoah refuse to go to the funeral as they are still raw from Bird Leg's funeral. Concerned about their safety, LaJoe sends the boys to stay with her mother a few miles west. Although the neighborhood is one of the poorest in Chicago, the gang violence and drugs are less prevalent. Now, Pharoah waits impatiently to go back to the Henry Suder Elementary School.

The author then describes the history of the school, funding issues for inner city schools in general, and financial and other disparities between predominantly black and white schools. Suder is exceptional in terms of safety and score improvements due to its relentless principal Brenda Daigre, a highly committed but strict and sometimes controversial woman. The teachers eventually win their demands and Pharoah begins fourth grade with teacher Diana Barone who takes a special interest in him. She recognizes his skills in writing and spelling. Pharoah is so comfortable and happy in the classroom that he stutters less and communicates openly and freely with his peers. Although he is often teased for being a nerd, he uses humor when possible to deflect the taunts. He is especially thrilled when Mrs. Barone asks him to read a funny essay he wrote in class and pins it on the wall for everyone to see.

Fall 1987 - Spring 1988, Chapter 7 Analysis

The school system in the Horner projects suffers from inadequacies similar to those of other inner city schools, including a lack of funding and overcrowded classrooms. The teachers strike is the fourth in five years as little improves. The inadequacy of funding is very apparent and little changes over the course of time in that regard, nor with student performance, tardiness, or attendance. After a brutally violent summer Pharoah is exceedingly anxious to go back to school. It is a sanctuary for him as there is structure through rules and schedules, caring adults vested in his future, and a sense of physical safety from the gangs. Once fourth grade finally starts, Pharoah opens up in this environment, turning from a withdrawn, stuttering boy to a confident, eager, communicative student. He shows tremendous potential in his abilities with reading, writing, and spelling. At the same time, the shadow of the world outside school is ever prevalent and this haven is just a temporary escape from the bigger realities outside.



Fall 1987 - Spring 1988, Chapter 8

Fall 1987 - Spring 1988, Chapter 8 Summary

At school, Pharoah is approached by a boy called Rickey, who is a year and a half older due to being held back a year. Rickey wants to know if Pharoah's cousin Dede will go out with him. Pharoah is flattered by the request and approaches Dede several times before she agrees. Pharoah and Rickey couldn't be more opposite. Physically, Pharoah is slight and short while Rickey is stocky and tall, making him look older than his years. They live on opposite sides of Damen Avenue, the street that separates the Vice Lords from the Disciples. Pharoah is a studious child and Rickey is an aggressive bully and troublemaker in school. Rickey is Bird Leg's cousin and witnessed his death. He has been full of rage since then, which he takes out on others. Pharoah and Rickey's friendship solidifies when Rickey punches a bully who had been picking on Pharoah. He comes to see Pharoah as a younger brother and feels the need to protect him. As Pharoah is not a physical threat, the ability of the bully to befriend the bookworm is understandable.

Lafayette is completely against this friendship as he worries that Rickey will lead Pharoah into trouble. He also gets upset that Pharoah won't stand up for himself and taunts him into fighting back for his own protection. At the same time, Lafayette is proud of how well his brother is doing in school. While inherently intelligent, Lafayette takes his own education less seriously with terrible attendance rates, but tests well in math, his favorite subject, and makes efforts to improve. He likes his sixth grade teacher, Mrs. Everage, and often confides in her about personal troubles. He admits he often finds himself daydreaming in class worrying about his younger siblings. Despite Lafayette's objections, Pharoah and Rickey's friendship continues.

Fall 1987 - Spring 1988, Chapter 8 Analysis

Like soldiers in war, Rickey and Pharoah suffer post-traumatic stress from experiencing gun battles with no adequate venue to express themselves other than aggression or withdrawal. Despite the oddities, their friendship is a natural alliance. Rickey offers protection while Pharoah is a safe, non-threatening ally. Rickey's understandable rage stems from witnessing his cousin's death and his desire to protect those less vulnerable. Lafayette's caution about this friendship is also understandable. His sense of responsibility weighs on him, as evidenced in the classroom where he day dreams about his siblings at the expense of his own personal growth. Lafayette's teacher in sixth grade provides an outlet for some of his frustrations, which results in improvements in his school work. It is evident that Lafayette is gifted, especially in subjects like math, but, given all the other obstacles in his life, it seems unlikely he will flourish academically.



Fall 1987 - Spring 1988, Chapter 9

Fall 1987 - Spring 1988, Chapter 9 Summary

This chapter begins with Pharoah burying the two goldfish his mother gave him as a Christmas present. He uses an ice cream stick to dig their shallow grave outside his building. He blesses the fish and prays they'll go to heaven instead of hell. It is another small shadow of death in a turbulent winter. The Rivers' home overflows as LaJoe's oldest daughter LaShawn and her two children, boyfriend, and boyfriend's brother move in. Thirteen people occupy the apartment if Paul, the father, shows up. Pharoah has trouble concentrating on school work, but feels safer as there would be witnesses if someone tried to snatch him. The chaos eats at LaJoe. She becomes increasingly short-tempered and has occasional explosive outbursts. The stress takes its toll physically with sleepless nights, colds, and headaches. In these times she fantasizes about starting over on her own and even wishes her children had not been born because of the challenges they face. This winter she sees her third son, Terrence, arrested and is informed by the Department of Public Aid that, as they have proof her husband has stayed in her apartment, they plan to cut off her benefits.

The chapter segues to Terrence's story. He is the son LaJoe is closest to but who disappoints her the most. Terrence grows up during turbulent times for his parents. LaJoe and Paul meet at a dance hall when LaJoe was only thirteen, pretending to be sixteen. She fantasizes about having a large family together in a quiet neighborhood and growing old in rocking chairs on the front porch. Her first child, LaShawn, arrives when she is only fourteen, a year later comes Paul, named after his father but known as Weasel, and then Terrence as their relationship starts falling apart. LaJoe discovers soon after Terrence's birth that Paul had fathered another child who was born at the same time. Determined to have a father for her children, LaJoe and Paul marry regardless but he begins drinking excessively and, unknown to her, develops a serious drug habit. Despite the fact he works steadily, LaJoe resents the money he spends on drugs, even after several overdoses land him in the hospital. And yet, they have five more children including Lafayette, Pharoah, and the triplets.

Terrence resents the attention that the younger children take away from him as previously he was the 'baby' who got anything he wanted from his mother. At age ten, he disappears from home and works for a local drug dealer named Charles who eventually adopts him. He earns as much as \$200 a day dealing drugs but misses his family and occasionally shows up for short amounts of time. Lafayette looks up to Terrence as a child. At the age of fourteen, Terrence fathers a child, repeating his mother's pattern. His child, a boy, is nicknamed Snuggles.

When on the streets, Terrence takes part in petty robberies, extracting coins from game machines. This results in short stints in juvenile detention. But this winter he is involved in a robbery in which a friend supposedly has a knife. He is staying with his family when



the police show up to arrest him for armed robbery. He will be tried as an adult. He is handcuffed and led away in front of his siblings.

Fall 1987 - Spring 1988, Chapter 9 Analysis

Pharoah's burial of his goldfish echoes the deterioration of his family in a confined surrounding, suffocating in numbers and barely able to breathe. LaJoe's explosive reactions are not surprising given the undue stress of her surroundings and concern for her increasingly troubled children. Her son Terrence's demise is especially difficult for her to manage emotionally due to their special connection.

Terrence's story is similar to so many young boys in poverty. Feeling displaced and neglected in a burgeoning family with parents in conflict, he finds solace and acceptance from a drug dealer, Charles, who goes as far as to adopt him. He feels special and is rewarded for his deeds. At the same time, he is torn between the streets and his love for his family, especially his mother. One life provides a sense of true caring and grounding, the other immediate and tangible reward. Caught up in petty crimes all his teenage life, he is finally caught between both worlds when he is arrested at home in front of his siblings and son. His world has finally crashed down on him and forebodes what might be in store for his younger brothers.



Fall 1987 - Spring 1988, Chapter 10

Fall 1987 - Spring 1988, Chapter 10 Summary

LaJoe goes to argue her case at the local welfare office when she is accused of welfare fraud. After a long wait, she is lead into the hearing room to be questioned by three case workers. The case workers argue that her husband has used her address as his residence and therefore she is "double dipping" into the system, which is not the case. LaJoe gets so upset that she is inadequate at defending herself or using her basic rights of legal counsel. Her benefits are cut off. Lafayette is upset at the news but he is the only one LaJoe confides in. She doesn't want to tell Pharoah as he has been so withdrawn and afraid lately. After the children go to bed, Lafayette joins his mother on the living room couch and tells her not to worry and that he is going to help her. He also tells her she shouldn't be so weak hearted as to take everyone into her home and carry all their burdens. He also talks about getting out of Horner and fantasizes about having a white, wood framed house one day. Lafayette offers to quit school and get a job but LaJoe says no. They talk until two in the morning. Lafayette has by now become distrustful of everyone outside of his family. His closest "associate," James, has moved out of Horner and he rarely sees him.

With Terrence in jail and Weasel staying with friends, LaJoe has the five youngest children to worry about. Weeks later, when LaJoe doesn't come home with groceries as usual, Pharoah realizes something is wrong. LaJoe leans on family and friends for help and joins an all-night women's card game, bringing home twenty or thirty dollars a night when lucky. She leaves for the game after the children are asleep and doesn't return until morning when they are ready to go to school. She rarely sleeps, just taking occasional catnaps. She also looks for work but is turned down everywhere she goes. Part of the problem is her timidity and lack of confidence and skills. She begins having angry outbursts, yelling at the children to sweep or take out the garbage. Her only solace is that there are people worse off and she even takes in a homeless couple one night. LaJoe has another hearing but again inadequately defends herself and loses the appeal.

As the summer of 1988 approaches, the shootings pick up again. Pharoah's stutter gets worse so he barely talks and he shakes at loud noises. Lafayette warns his mother if they don't get out soon, someone will die. On May 22nd, a nine-year old boy named Alonzo is shot in the back of the head. Two days earlier, an emotionally disturbed women enters an elementary school in Winnetka and shoot a number of children, later turning the gun on herself. This makes national headlines and the community rallies to deal with the tragedy. The Governor calls for increased school security while others demand tighter gun control laws. Alonzo's shooting receives coverage in one local newspaper and only because the response contrasts so sharply with the Winnetka shooting. Alonzo, who amazingly survived, receives no counseling, nor do any of his family or friends. The affluent neighborhood mobilize to comfort its wounded while in Horner, poor in spirit and resources, nothing happens.



Fall 1987 - Spring 1988, Chapter 10 Analysis

In this chapter we see some of the bureaucratic struggles welfare recipients like LaJoe must endure to try to make ends meet. LaJoe is so intimidated by the process that while she has a definitive case to support receiving benefits, she is paralyzed when it comes to presenting evidence or asking questions. The situation adds even more anxiety to an already highly stressed family environment. The children respond to the situation differently. Lafayette feels the need to do something on top of the responsibility he already shoulders and Pharoah becomes more withdrawn and frightened.

The stark difference between the child shootings in affluent Winnetka and impoverished Horner Homes is a reflection of public attitudes and a general sense of apathy about the poor in our nation. While the affluent communities have all the necessary resources at their disposal, poorer communities who need them most are provided next to nothing. The news coverage in this case is also a reflection of the media's more fixated attention on white or affluent crimes than the equally, if not more, violent crimes that take place in low-income communities.



Fall 1987 - Spring 1988, Chapter 11

Fall 1987 - Spring 1988, Chapter 11 Summary

LaJoe, Lafayette, Pharoah and the triplets visit Terrence in Cook County Jail. The jail is severely overcrowded with seven thousand inmates in a facility built for twelve hundred, so many inmates sleep on mattresses on the floor. The family is led to a visitation area where there is a counter, stools and a wall of bullet proof glass. Visitors must speak to inmates loudly through a metal plate. Terrence is excited to see his family. Pharoah is soon distracted by a couple arguing next to him. He starts to get a headache. After a while, Terrence becomes despondent and angry, insisting he is innocent of the crime. LaJoe believes him as he has only claimed his innocence once on any previous arrests and he was found innocent. Several years ago he had been accused of shooting a girl but in the end, she admitted that a friend had told her to finger Terrence.

Terrence spends much of the visit lecturing Lafayette to stay in school and out of trouble. He does not want Lafayette to follow in his footsteps. Lafayette listens intently to the long speech. After the visit, Lafayette can't get his mind off Terrence and constantly asks his mother when he will be coming home. Pharoah also thinks about his brother and is angry at the injustice if he is innocent. Pharoah has a strong sense of right and wrong and will even tell on himself if he's done something wrong. Having a brother in jail is yet another loss for Lafayette and Pharoah and it takes its toll on them. LaJoe assures them that at least it is keeping Terrence off the streets for now but his little brothers just want him home.

Fall 1987 - Spring 1988, Chapter 11 Analysis

Through the River family's eyes, this chapter provides insight into the overcrowded and ineffective jail system. Most inmates are poor and black and cannot afford bond fees. Even if they are innocent, they have to stay in jail to wait their day in court. Terrence is familiar with doing time but is frustrated and agitated as he feels unjustly incarcerated.

In his speech to Lafayette, Terrence acknowledges his mistakes and regrets and his jail time serves as a warning of what to expect if Lafayette goes down the wrong path. Pharoah is overwhelmed in the noisy, crowded visiting room and gets one of his headaches, a manifestation of his stress. Whether Terrence is a criminal or not, his brothers love him and knowing he is in jail causes them anguish and a deepening sense of loss.



Fall 1987 - Spring 1988, Chapter 12

Fall 1987 - Spring 1988, Chapter 12 Summary

This short chapter centers on Pharoah's spelling bee. Pharoah is one of the top two students to perform in his class spelling bee and will be part of the school contest, which includes the top students of all the middle grades. Pharoah works diligently to prepare but is concerned about his stutter. He is afraid of being humiliated in front of the whole school. He practices saying the words and letters slowly to avoid stuttering. On the day of the contest he is a bundle of nerves even though his teacher and classmates are encouraging. During the competition Pharoah is so focused on controlling his speech that he barely listens to the other students. More and more are eliminated until just five are left standing. But Pharoah begins losing control, his hands balling up under his untucked shirt. He is given the word "Endurance" to spell. Pharoah knows the word as well as its meaning. He spells the first four letters and then his throat closes up. Much as he tries, he can't get the next letter out. The buzzer finally sounds and Pharoah is out of the competition. He feels utterly distraught. Ms. Barone tries to comfort him and tells him she is proud of him.

When he gets home, Pharoah marches straight to his room. LaJoe suspects something is wrong and follows him in. When he tells her what happened, she assures him that it was nothing to be ashamed of because he had tried his hardest. Pharoah is LaJoe's greatest hope for having a child with a high school diploma. Pharoah promises he will try harder next year, a promise he intends to keep.

Fall 1987 - Spring 1988, Chapter 12 Analysis

Pharoah's goals are adversely affected by the undue family and environmental stresses around him. He wants to win the spelling bee more than anything in the world and works diligently to overcome his stutter. Under the high-pressure situation of the competition, his body fails him. He is not in control of his speech as he is not in control of his life, the controlling factors far outweigh his young abilities. He takes any academic failure seriously and does more to punish himself than anyone else could.



Summer 1988, Chapter 13

Summer 1988, Chapter 13 Summary

One humid day in May, LaJoe is the happiest she has been for a long time. Over fifty adults and children are gathered in front of her building, dancing and listening to music being played by eighteen-year old Craig Davis. Craig doesn't live in Horner but is often around to visit his girlfriend who lives in the same building as the Rivers. He is a rare young man in that he is in his senior year in high school when the dropout rate is around seventy-five percent. He is not in a gang, and he talks about concrete goals for the future, which include caring for his children, going to college, becoming a deejay, and living outside of the city. He often plays basketball with Lafeyette, who idolizes him. Craig shows off his deejay skills to the delight of the tenants. LaJoe relishes in the moment and notices how Lafeyette seems more at ease than he has in a long time. Pharoah is also having a great time and for the moment, life seems good. Lafeyette is also growing to accept Ricky as Pharoah's friend and enjoys his company and generosity.

There is more reason to celebrate. A friend has bailed Terrence from jail and with the help of his committed public defender it appears he will be found not guilty. LaJoe also reapplied for public benefits and this time she was not denied, though the benefits will not include health insurance. And LaJoe's niece, Dawn (Porkchop's sister), is about to graduate from Crane High School. Dawn, a mother of four with her boyfriend, Demetrius, has often leaned on LaJoe for advice and encouragement. LaJoe hosts a celebratory dinner for Dawn, filled with family and friends. Lafeyette and Pharoah are in awe of Dawn and brag about how they will do more years of college than she will. Neither brother relishes the idea of attending Crane, however, as it is one of Chicago's worst high schools. The school is overcrowded and there is a pervasive sense of fear amongst the students and faculty as security is a problem. Many Horner students move in with relatives in different neighborhoods to avoid going to Crane. LaJoe hopes that Dawn will be successful in life so that her children can see the benefits of a diploma.

Dawn and Demetrius are recognized in The Chicago Sun Times for being an exception to the rule in their community. The headline reads "How Young Pair Beat Odds in Public Housing". The article describes how Dawn became a mother at fourteen and went on to have three more children and how Demetrius took on the responsibility of caring for the children while she was in school. They are described as a loving couple with plans for the future. Lafeyette and Pharoah have photocopies of the article which they show off to their friends.

Summer 1988, Chapter 13 Analysis

This chapter offers a sense of hope for the Rivers family. Terrence's trial appears to be going well, LaJoe's benefits are being restored, and her niece is graduating high school,



an unusual milestone in the family. Craig and Dawn are strong, inspirational role models for Lafayette and Pharoah in a world full of disappointing adults. They offer a glimmer of hope that there is an opportunity leave the projects through education. They also exhibit a positive life free of drugs and gang activity. As a result, LaJoe is far more relaxed and hopeful than she has been in a very long time. She wishes desperately that she could hang onto this time forever with a sense of yearning, knowing it will probably be short lived.



Summer 1988, Chapter 14

Summer 1988, Chapter 14 Summary

Two significant court cases are on trial that have a direct impact on Horner, one involving an eight-year old girl named Urica Winder and the other Vice Lord boss Jimmy Lee. Urica is in court as a witness to murder. Two men, Lawrence Jackson and Bobbie Driskel, broke into her apartment. They killed a woman named Shirley, Urica's mother, her mother's boyfriend, and her four-year old sister. Urica was also stabbed forty-eight times but miraculously survived. She shows her scars to the packed, awestruck courtroom. Urica is surprisingly calm through the proceedings, a child undoubtedly numbed by tragedy. When asked what Bobbie Driskel did with a pen he had in his hand, she simply says, "Dugged my guts out." It only takes the Jury an hour to find Jackson guilty on four counts of murder and he is sentenced to death. Driskel is sentenced to life in prison. The murders took place in a robbery attempt, from which the two men profited \$120.

Residents of Horner Homes refer to Urica as the miracle child because of her amazing strength of character and ability to survive the odds. They are surprised that she still lives at Horner with her grandmother, just two flights up from where her mother and sister were murdered. The grandmother is offered an apartment in the Cabrini Green projects but refuses to move because at least she knows people at Horner.

The other big case involves Jimmy Lee. While he has been in and out of court many times, he is a frustration to the police force as he rarely carries a gun or drugs, letting others do his dirty work. Back in 1986, however, Michael Cronin, a seventeen-year police veteran, acted on a tip that Lee might have a gun in his home. The police raided his home and found more than they hoped for, including heroin, drug-packaging equipment, and a nine-millimeter assault rifle with twenty-eight live rounds. Lee was released on bond and continued business as usual. Now, in the pre-sentencing hearing, Lee faces Judge Boharic. The prosecutor suggests Lee be sent to prison for a long time to send a message to the community. Boharic agrees and sentences Lee to the maximum term of thirty years. News of the long sentence spreads like wildfire through Horner Homes. LaJoe warns her sons not to talk about the case as you never know who is listening. One boy tries to shield his face from a reporter's camera and his pose in the image is mistaken as celebration. The next day he is severely beaten. The residents suspect it will not be long before Jimmy Lee is replaced.

Summer 1988, Chapter 14 Analysis

This chapter centers on themes of crime and punishment as well as injustice. The two cases are unusual only in their severity and the people involved. The little girl's shocking ordeal is a magnified reflection of what many children of Horner have experienced but her tenacity to survive and willingness to testify in court has a reverberating effect in the



community. She has not only survived but has acted far braver than most of the residents admit they would be. The sad part of her story is that she is still in the projects, as if all the suffering in the world is not enough to help a person get out.

Jimmy Lee's harsh conviction is intended to send a message to gang members that their behavior will not be tolerated. However the Horner community knows that the problem will not go away. The gangs will remain and someone will take Jimmy Lee's place for better or for worse. There is also the possibility of gang battles resuming to claim Lee's throne. LaJoe warns her children not to speak about either case. Her fear, shared by many mothers, is that the children might be overheard and someone will target them for having any opinions on the subject. The boy who is targeted for mistakenly looking like he is celebrating Lee's conviction reinforces those fears.



Summer 1988, Chapter 15

Summer 1988, Chapter 15 Summary

With older children and their offspring and partners back in the home, LaJoe must feed thirteen adults and children. Once a month after receiving her benefits, she takes the gypsy cab to three discount grocery stores and purchases a month's worth of items. This month, Rochelle helps her out. Since her benefits have just been reinstated, LaJoe buys some special treats for the children, including fresh fruit and popsicles. When she returns home, all the children come out to help her carry the bags. She is surprised not to see Pharoah around as he loves to help her with groceries. She presumes he forgot as his memory has been poor lately.

Pharoah is actually daydreaming in his secret place, a lush, grassy lawn around a condominium complex called Damen Courts he has discovered about three blocks south of Horner. He loves the quiet solitude of laying in the shade on the grass. He often ventures to shoot marbles or read comic books or think about next year's spelling bee. He has not told anyone of his refuge. He wants this to be a place all his own where he doesn't have to worry about gunshots. After Jimmy Lee's conviction, things are unusually quiet around the Horner Homes and with the lessening violence, Pharoah's stutter is much less noticeable. Recently LaJoe took Pharoah to a health clinic where a counselor explained the stutter was stress related. His mother tells him it acts like a warning mechanism when gunshots go off or danger lurks. Pharoah and Lafeyette have found other fun distractions over the summer such as a swimming pool in Union Park and the Boys Club where they shoot pool or basketball. There is also a man called Red who rides around their building on an adult tricycle and offers the children gifts he has found in the trash, such as tennis balls or plastic necklaces. Pharoah has tried to convince Lafeyette and Rickey to take him back to the railroad tracks but they refuse as more rumors spread about the dangers in the area.

When Pharoah returns home, LaJoe asks him where he has been. He pretends he was playing video games with Porkchop but the guilt of lying to his mother eats him up. Later, he tells her about his secret place and how he is able to clear his mind of everything there.

Summer 1988, Chapter 15 Analysis

Things continue to stay fairly positive for the Rivers. LaJoe is able to feed her enormous family with her benefits reinstated and the gangs have been quiet since Jimmy Lee's arrest. Compared to the previous summer with constant gun battles raging, there is a sense of relative calm and as a result, Pharoah's stutter has also improved. Pharoah's secret place is reminiscent of the railroad tracks at the beginning of the story where he was struck with a similar sense of tranquility. As an introspective child, the grassy patch

by Damen Courts offers Pharoah a chance to quietly digest his feelings and conjure his imagination away from the noises and distractions of the projects.



Fall 1988-Winter 1989, Chapter 16

Fall 1988-Winter 1989, Chapter 16 Summary

Initially Lafayette hangs around Rickey to keep an eye on Pharoah, but they soon became friends as well. However, most of Rickey's friends have been in trouble with the law and a group of them, including Rickey, have been arrested for "smash and grabs" where they break a side window of a car at a stoplight and grab a purse or briefcase on the seat. Because of his troubles at Suder, Rickey is transferred to the Moses Montefiore School for troubled boys. One day Pharoah, Lafayette, Rickey, and some other friends go window shopping at discount stores on Chicago Avenue. Lafayette feels uncomfortable as he knows people look at them as dirty Horner boys. He suggests they go to a more crowded video-cassette store on Milwaukee Avenue, a large bustling street full of small shops and fast-food restaurants.

Once they get to Erol's Video Club, Pharoah is captivated by the Wrestle Mania movies. He is a big fan of professional wrestling. He notices Rickey whispering to Lafayette that they should "take some." Pharoah tells Lafayette that they should leave but Lafayette becomes defensive and tells Pharoah to go home. Pharoah and the other boys leave. Rickey and Lafayette each pilfer a case, unaware they are being viewed on a security camera in the back room. As the boys try to leave the store, they are stopped by Mario Vera, the assistant manager. They try to talk their way out of the situation but Mario tells them that it is store policy to call the police. He takes them to a back room. Lafayette is polite while Rickey is hostile and defensive.

When the police arrive, Vera doesn't press charges so the police take the boys close to their home and drop them off with a stern warning. LaJoe finds out about the shoplifting event through a neighbor's daughter. She is afraid of losing Lafayette to the streets the way she lost Terrence. She thinks the experience may have been a good lesson to scare Lafayette away from ever shoplifting again. She grounds him for over a week and starts giving him more responsibilities. She makes him the beneficiary of her life insurance policy. If anything happens to her, he is to use the money to take care of his younger siblings. She also asks him to cremate her to save funeral costs. The talk of death upsets Pharoah and he doesn't believe Lafayette will take care of him as well as his mother. He becomes wary of Rickey and is disappointed in Lafayette. Like his brother, Pharoah decides not to have friends anymore, just "associates".

Fall 1988-Winter 1989, Chapter 16 Analysis

Lafayette gets in trouble with the law for the first time, egged on by peer pressure to commit a petty theft. It is an indication he might be more seriously manipulated down the road. Lafayette feels guilty about what he has done and there is a sense that for now he will walk the straight and narrow. Pharoah is very disappointed in Lafayette as he has such a strong sense of right and wrong. The worst crime Pharoah has



committed at this point is talking too much in class and he doesn't intend to get into any worse trouble than that. Like his brother, Pharoah distances himself from friends, not knowing who he can really trust. Meanwhile, LaJoe tries to see the positive in what happened. Her reaction is to give Lafayette a stronger sense of responsibility in the hope he will rise to new duties. When she makes him her benefactor and gives him instructions should she die, she is in fact adding stress to his life with new concerns over thoughts of losing her.



Fall 1988-Winter 1989, Chapter 17

Fall 1988-Winter 1989, Chapter 17 Summary

To make some spending money, Lafeyette, Pharoah and their friends often go to the Chicago Blackhawk and Bulls games and offer to protect parked cars for game attendees. They are often shooed away by the police but sometimes get lucky enough to get donated tickets to the game. Even if they get free tickets, the attendants don't always let them into the game, saying no neighborhood kids are allowed. One late afternoon in December, Lafeyette and Pharoah decide to go to the Blackhawks game to make some cash. Pharoah refuses to wear his "starter" jacket, a nylon jacket with the sports team logo, because kids have been stealing them and several boys have been murdered for their jackets. Instead he wears a black polyester coat. Pharoah takes the job protecting cars very seriously. One time, he only periodically checked on a car while watching the game on television. When he returned at the end of the game, the car window was shattered. Pharoah felt terrible and apologized profusely to the driver and was upset all the next day as his conscience bothered him.

The relationship between the neighborhood and stadium has always been tense. The chapter delves into the social and political history of the area since the stadium was built. Over the past twenty years the stadium's owners, the Wirz family, have changed the character of the neighborhood, bulldozing homes for parking lots. The area became a stage for the riots following the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. The fires destroyed \$10 million worth of property resulting in business owners fleeing the area for their safety. Since then, it has been inhabited by liquor stores, currency exchanges, and used appliance stores. Plans developed in the mid-1980s to construct two new stadiums. Real estate was grabbed up and rumors were the area was going to be gentrified and Henry Horner Homes might be torn down for more parking lots and upscale housing. While authorities claimed there were no such plans, the vacancy rate at Horner increased. A few groups challenged the construction of the new stadiums but their voices were not effective. The stadium still causes bad feelings on game nights as the neighborhood is flooded with police. The residents question why there is only this much protection and extra lighting when outsiders are in the area.

On this evening Lafeyette, Pharoah, and Porkchop join some friends as they head to the stadium. One boy tells them the police told them to stay away but they decide to go anyway. Lafeyette helps a parking lot attendant wave in cars, hoping to make five to ten dollars. A policeman approaches and tells Lafeyette and a few of his friends to go home. The policeman grabs Lafeyette by the collar and heaves him into a puddle, then kicks him in the rear. He calls him a punk and says the white people don't have money to give to "niggers". One friend runs to tell Pharoah, who is back in the playground at Horner by now. Pharoah is afraid to go back in case the policeman kicks him too but he is also afraid to tell his mom in case she gets arrested for letting her children be out too late. Meanwhile, two other boys have told LaJoe. She runs to find Lafeyette in the back seat of a squad car and argues with the policeman who threw Lafeyette on the ground. Two



other officers arrive and release Lafayette. One officer warns him he could get hurt out at night but Lafayette responds that he's lived around there all his life and only the police have hurt him.

For weeks Lafayette and Pharoah do not work at the stadium and LaJoe tells them never to go back, but eventually they do. Pharoah returns first, having discovered a new way to make money. He and his friends perform a "chicken wing" dance for a white stadium-goer who gives them a few dollars to mimic squawking chickens. Now ten years old, Pharoah starts to question his skin color. He wonders if all black people are poor and believes white police don't like black children. Lafayette's incident with the police brings back unsettling memories for LaJoe. While she sympathizes with the police because it is not safe for them to enter Horner, she doesn't fully trust them. Much of the distrust is rooted in the past. Residents at Horner have been victims of police overzealousness. In the late 1960s several youths were killed by police at a time when the community was more galvanized by action. Local groups fought to get a traffic sign installed on a busy road where several children had been hit by cars. In one protest, a twenty-one year-old was arrested for obstructing traffic and resisting arrest, and later killed by a policeman. His brother had been shot by a policeman five days earlier. The community was so outraged that they staged a furious twenty-minute gun battle with the police. The traffic light was installed but police shootings continued. The police stormed the home of Mark Clark, the head of the Illinois chapter of the Black Panthers, and shot him. His death garnered national attention and five thousand mourners attended a memorial. LaJoe knows not all of the police officers are bad. There are a few who genuinely care for the children of Horner. But she doesn't understand why, when the police do something wrong, they don't apologize for it.

The apartment is bulging with people that winter. LaJoe's mother has also moved in. She is depressed from having suffered a stroke that has paralyzed one side of her body. She sleeps on the couch and tells the children stories about the old days at Horner when it was so safe you didn't have to lock your doors. Lafayette is close to his grandma and likes to take care of her. She gives Lafayette and Pharoah her old black and white TV so they can watch it in the privacy of their room, away from all the commotion. Lafayette and Pharoah are bothered by their father's depression. Paul is still not working and drinking and occasionally using drugs. Lafayette resents his father for all his unfulfilled promises of getting a house outside of Horner. Paul continues to come around so that his children know they have a father, however poor he might be at the task. One afternoon Pharoah finds him looking depressed and urges him to join him outside but Paul refuses. Pharoah asks him why he drinks and what he gets out of it. The question surprises Paul as he knows he needs to stop drinking. Pharoah assures him he will get another job before running outside to join Porkchop.

Fall 1988-Winter 1989, Chapter 17 Analysis

Lafayette's encounter with the police reflects the general distrust between white police and poor, inner city blacks in the community. The distrust is firmly rooted in a history when police brutality and lack of accountability was far more prevalent. Fear-based



prejudices still exist on both sides. The Homer residents feel that they cannot trust those who are supposed to protect them while the police feel they are not safe trying to do so. There is also resentment about the contrast in security provided to "outsiders" who attend the game compared to those who live in the area. It is one of many ways that the Homer residents feel like second class citizens and separate from the rest of the world. Pharoah realizes some of these injustices when he rationalizes that white police simply don't like black children. Lafayette's experience has heightens his distrust of police. LaJoe is empathetic about the dangers the police face in the neighborhood but she knows enough history from living in the projects all her life to be wary. Pharoah also recognizes his father's drinking problem is interfering with his ability to work. Lafayette resents his father for all the false promises he has made about getting out of Horner. Paul recognizes his problem and regrets his failures but seems powerless to change in his depressive state.



Fall 1988-Winter 1989, Chapter 18

Fall 1988-Winter 1989, Chapter 18 Summary

In winter the projects are stifling hot with apartment temperatures typically in the mid-eighties. The only way to find relief from the oven-like conditions is to open windows, but then frigid drafts blow in. Lafayette has developed a blistering cough as a result. In order to get the children out of the torrid conditions, LaJoe takes Pharoah and the triplets, plus her grandchildren and one of their friends, to see the holiday window decorations downtown. She assumes Lafayette will feel too old so she doesn't take him along, which she later regrets. LaJoe and the eight children take a bus downtown. They are in awe of the pedestrians on the street and the mechanical dolls in the windows. They express a desire to live with the toys as they look so magical and happy. They visit the downtown Christmas tree which is actually a giant tree comprised of many smaller ones, another wonder. Their last stop is at a popcorn emporium where LaJoe's mother used to take her as a child. LaJoe buys two big bags of caramel and cheese popcorn, which they gobble up. The children agree it's the best popcorn in the world.

On the way home, the children are happy and giddy from the experience and LaJoe resolves to take them on trips more often. Although exhausted, LaJoe feels energized at seeing her children so relaxed and content. At home, Lafayette is upset she didn't take him along. She realizes that despite his adult worries and responsibilities, he is only thirteen years old. She promises herself to take him next time. Lafayette is also upset that his brother Terrence might go to jail for ten years. Since his last arrest, he committed an armed burglary with friends and admits to this crime. His rationale is that if he is going to get sent to jail for a crime he didn't commit, he might as well commit a crime to justify the time. The prosecution is overwhelmed with cases so offer him a ten year sentence. His defense attorney is hopeful she can convince them to reduce the offer to six years since it is Terrence's first offense as an adult.

Fall 1988-Winter 1989, Chapter 18 Analysis

The special outing is a big treat for the children, most of whom have never visited downtown despite living just a few miles away. The holiday window displays are a magical sight but represent a world that is completely inaccessible to them. Nevertheless, the stimulating sights and sounds are a welcome distraction from the sweltering heat of the apartment and cabin fever. By taking the children to the popcorn emporium, LaJoe creates a family tradition as it was one of her favorite memories as a child that she now repeats for her children.

Terrence's legal problems continue to haunt his brothers. Given his personal experience with the law, Lafayette's confidence in justice and the legal system is certainly declining. The idea that his brother might be gone for ten years is extremely upsetting. Pharoah,

with his reasoning, calculates he would be twenty by the time Terrence is free. This is of course assuming he lives that long which he has wondered many times.



Fall 1988-Winter 1989, Chapter 19

Fall 1988-Winter 1989, Chapter 19 Summary

The children have a good Christmas holiday as LaJoe has been putting gifts on layaway for months to give them items they want. On December 30th Pharoah insists on staying up all night so the next night he'll sleep through the New Years Eve celebratory gun shots he knows to expect. In February Pharoah returns to the Chicago Stadium to make some cash for the Boys Club annual talent show. The show has been an annual event since the Boys Club first opened, with local children and young men and women singing, dancing and doing comedy acts. At the event, Lafeyette and Pharoah are in a top bleacher row where they can stand for a clear view of the stage. Porkchop is also with them. The master of ceremonies finally comes out and in preparation for singing the national anthem, asks "Don't you love your country?" The crowd roars "no", drowning out Pharoah's quiet "yes". Only a few audience members, including Pharoah, put their hands on their hearts during the anthem.

As the show gets underway, Lafeyette wanders off with a companion. One girl sings a particularly popular song, Superwoman. Rickey appears and buys Pharoah a hot dog, which he splits with Porkchop. The gangs have called a truce to attend the show, so many are in attendance. A rumor spreads through the dance that haunts Pharoah and Lafeyette for weeks to come. A teenage girl who they both know has been shot in the head four times. A few days later, Lafeyette goes to visit Craig Davis. Craig shows him a poem he has written about the importance of education. Craig mentions he will deejay another event at the Boys Club in a few weeks and tells Lafeyette to come.

On Thursdays, Pharoah shuts himself in his room for "brain day". He is preparing for his upcoming spelling bee and practices spelling the words out loud and conquering his stutter. Sometimes Lafeyette joins him and tries to stump him with difficult words. Pharoah is also studying harder in school. He befriends Clarise, the smartest girl in his class who is a good six inches taller than him. She is also the youngest Suder student to be selected for an upcoming trip to Africa. On Tuesday and Thursday mornings they meet at the school half an hour early to test each other. Clarise helps Pharoah with words that make him stutter. They begin to call each other "partner". A week before the spelling bee, two men - a neighbor called Tough Luck and Willie, a man LaShawn's boyfriend sells fake jewelry with - get in an altercation at the Rivers' apartment. LaJoe is out but Paul, the triplets, and grandmother are home. Tough Luck accuses Willie of stealing a tire and fires his gun, just missing him. The triplets hide while the grandmother rolls off the couch onto the floor. Tough Luck finally leaves. When LaJoe finds out she is furious at Tough Luck.

A few days later LaJoe's mother moves out as she can't take the chaos and violence any more. She goes to live with a different daughter. Pharoah misses her but Lafeyette is happy she is not in as much danger now. Meanwhile, LaShawn is expecting her third child. She initially goes to Rush-Presbyterian-St. Luke's Hospital but is transferred to



another one in a manner known as "patient dumping". She stopped smoking Karachi in her seventh month of pregnancy but when her son (DeShaun) is born, opiates and cocaine appear in his system. The Department of Child and Family Services intervenes but eventually let LaShawn take her baby home. Pharoah and Lafayette worry about the expense another baby will involve but both adore small children so are happy to have him around. In anticipation of the spelling bee, Pharoah dreams he gets a good job and wears a brand new suit and shoes. In his dream he works in an office with a big metal desk and co-workers refer to him as "the brain". The dream makes him feel happy and want to get a good job to help his mother out of the projects. Pharoah also finishes reading *Old Yeller*, a book he enjoys tremendously because the dog always helps out the boy.

Fall 1988-Winter 1989, Chapter 19 Analysis

The Boys Club party is a rare time when gang members socialize without violence, though news of a teenage girl being shot in the head puts a dampener on the evening. When the national anthem is about to be sung, it is not surprising that the majority of participants answer "no" to the question about loving their country. As poor, black inner city youth, they do not see their nation as a land of opportunity and feel like a forgotten part of America. Pharoah is an exception as he does view his future with hope. He is working hard for his spelling bee and dreams of being a successful business man. He forges a strong alliance with a like-minded classmate, Clarise, who gives him the encouragement and academic support he needs. The fight between Willie and Tough Luck is especially frightening as it is the first time a gun has been fired in the apartment. It is also the final straw that causes their grandmother to move out. However, while one family member leaves in this revolving household, a new one, LaShawn's baby boy, moves in. A baby will undoubtedly bring more chaos and expense to an already chaotic and impoverished household.



Spring 1989, Chapter 20

Spring 1989, Chapter 20 Summary

This short chapter focuses on Craig Davis. March 2nd is an icy, winter day. Craig has graduated Cregier High School and works as a stock boy for a stationary company. After work he goes to Henry Horner to briefly visit his girlfriend, then takes a bus to his uncle's home in the ABLA projects where he also lives, along with his uncle's girlfriend. Craig gathers some tapes and turntable needles and tells his uncle he plans to visit a friend to get two turntables and speakers for the party he will deejay at the Boys Club the following evening.

Meanwhile two white police officers, Francis Higgins and Richard Marianos, cruise the streets of the APBLA project in an unmarked sedan. They are part of new gun task force nicknamed the Gunbusters, focused on illegal arms shipments. They are looking for someone they know only as "Craig" who they have heard recently purchased a sawed-off shotgun. The officers come across Craig Davis and his friends who are on their way to pick up the stereo equipment. On seeing the officers, Craig panics and runs as he doesn't want to go to jail again. Five months earlier he was visiting a friend and got caught in a raid for stealing cookies from a delivery truck. Craig had no knowledge or involvement in the theft so was released, but the experience shook him up. Marianos chases Craig while Higgins questions the other boys. Later, Higgins says the boys told him Craig's first name, but the boys deny it. Higgins lets the boys go and joins Marianos, who has lost sight of Craig.

Later, Craig sees his friends and still determined to get the equipment he needs for the Boys Club party, yells at them, "Let's get them turntables!" Unfortunately, the officers spot them. Marianos pulls out his gun and runs after Craig who is racing to his uncle's house for refuge. Marianos catches up, grabs Craig from behind, and slams him against a wall. He holds the gun barrel to Craig's head. Later Marianos claims that there was a scuffle but the medical report seems to dispute that. Regardless, Marianos slides on the ice and his gun accidentally discharges. Craig's mother, who lives in a high rise nearby, hears the gun shot. So does his uncle, but neither think anything of it as they are used to the sound.

Craig's uncle eventually goes outside to see what is going on and finds his nephew lying face down in a pool of blood. People are shouting threats at the police and yelling at them for not caring since it's just "another nigger". Friends rush to inform Craig's mother that he has been shot and taken to Mount Sinai Hospital, the same place where she gave birth to him. The medical technicians try to revive Craig but pronounce him dead at 8:48pm. Following his death the police claim he was a Black Gangster Disciple and suspected gun runner. Two days later, a one-paragraph account of the shooting appears in the Chicago Sun-Times citing police claims that Craig was approached to be interviewed about firearms trafficking and that he grabbed the officer, which led to the scuffle.



Spring 1989, Chapter 20 Analysis

This chapter provides another example of questionable police tactics and brutality. At this point we know Craig was not involved in gangs or drugs and was an upstanding role model for the children in his neighborhood. He graduated high school, had a job, lifted the community's spirit with music, and was always cheerful and positive. The injustice of his death will undoubtedly widen the divide between the community and law enforcement and further inflame feelings of hate, fear, and distrust of the police. The media, as usual, pays little mind to the killing of a young black man in the projects.



Spring 1989, Chapter 21

Spring 1989, Chapter 21 Summary

On March 2nd, Pharoah dresses up for his spelling bee. He irons a sweater, dons a new pair of jeans, and shines his Fila high-tops with white shoe polish. He also sneaks some of his older brother Weasel's cologne. When he gets to school, Clarise can't believe how spiffy he looks. His new teacher, Mr. Rogers, encourages both students and promises the class a party if either one win. Pharoah is much more confident on stage. He doesn't stutter this time. His practice has paid off. More and more students are eliminated until only he and Clarise remain. They are both delighted as they would each be happy if the other won. Finally, Clarise wins but Pharoah feels great for coming in second place and is happy for his friend. He is also ecstatic that he made it through the event without stuttering once. He rushes home to tell his mother but something is obviously wrong. Rochelle is there as well as a neighbor named Dutt. Pharoah tells his mother about his second place win but stammers and stutters with the tension in the room. He realizes no one wants to listen so he quietly leaves to look for Porkchop. The women are talking about Craig's death while Lafayette sits huddled on the microwave in silence.

Lafayette dresses in one of Terrence's suits for Craig's funeral, which is held at one of the most esteemed black-owned funeral homes in the city. The service is packed with standing room only. The gathering includes a number of Craig's old teachers, children from Horner and ABLA, and colleagues from work. Lafayette arrives with LaJoe. Pharoah chooses not to attend. The silence in the funeral home mirrors the silence about Craig's death in the community. Craig's mother, Christine, has spent four days trying to learn what happened but no one will speak to her as the case is still "under investigation". They promise someone will get in touch with her, but no one ever does. In the autopsy, the coroner finds no traces of alcohol or drugs. No one knew of any gang affiliation or knew him to ever carry a gun. The case was ruled an accidental homicide. Soon after the shooting a police neighborhood relations officer visits the community to quash rumors more than anything. The principal of Cregier tries to talk Craig's friends who were with him the night of the shooting into go to the police but they are too scared. They worry that they will end up in jail or be targeted by the police. Craig's death is far different then the death of the Soto brothers twenty years earlier. This time, no one rises and protests the injustice. Rather, quiet whispers ineffectively flow in the wind.

Lafayette doesn't stay for the service. On viewing Craig's body all he can think about are the fun times he spent with Craig. He becomes increasingly depressed, sleeping long hours after school and hiding all his emotions. He shuts everything out of his mind and decides he is not going to be scared of anything because even if he does nothing, he could still go to jail or get shot. Only two days after Craig's funeral, Lafayette loses another friend who dies in a car accident during a police chase. When Lafayette hears



the news, he tells his mother to "let him rest" as he doesn't want to talk about it. He also doesn't want to attend any more funerals.

Spring 1989, Chapter 21 Analysis

Pharoah's increasing confidence at the spelling bee exemplifies all the months he has been practicing as well as the strong, positive relationship he shares with Clarise. But his celebration is squashed by the news of Craig's death. The lack of response from the police again highlights the divide that exists between the community and law enforcement. The community itself does little to respond compared to their activism twenty years earlier. Fear, apathy, and numbness have taken over. Lafayette's already fragile psychological state is broken by the loss of his friend. He has shut down almost completely and goes through the motions of life like the walking dead, expressing no emotion or thought. It is unlikely that this will change much as long as he remains in the same environment.



Spring 1989, Chapter 22

Spring 1989, Chapter 22 Summary

A week after Craig's funeral there is a hail storm. Pharoah races home from school, soon followed by Lafayette. Pharoah jumps on the coach with the triplets and his eight-year old niece Tyisha to watch cartoons. LaJoe is out applying for a job at a hospital so Lafayette takes charge of the household. He has been cold and on edge since the funeral and barks at the children to help him clean. Cleaning is his way of coping with stress, like his mother. When the children don't respond he starts screaming until they move into action. Pharoah decides to clean the bathrooms so he can escape his brother's wrath. Recently Lafayette punched him in the eye when he tried to maneuver for a seat by the window in a friend's car. Lafayette has been ranging from full-blown outbursts of fury and revenge to quiet tolerance. He occasionally goes to Craig's girlfriend's apartment and sits with her in silence. One time he reads a poem Craig wrote about life and death, which haunts him. LaJoe is worried about Lafayette, especially when he says he is "tired". He is recognizing his own mortality and at thirteen often looks like an old man. A month later, gunfire sounds outside. LaJoe moves the children to the safety of the hallway, but Lafayette doesn't move off the couch and continues to calmly watch television.

Spring 1989, Chapter 22 Analysis

This chapter further explores the psychological impact that Craig's death and the social environment are having on Lafayette. His emotions, ranging from anger to indifference, are evident in his language and actions. His manic cleaning frenzy is a physical outlet for his stress and his siblings are easy targets for the brunt of his rage. Lafayette is starting to understand his vulnerability and rather than avoid fearful situations, such as gunshots, he accepts that he might die regardless, as his friend did. He is emotionally and mentally exhausted but sees no escape or change in the future, other than death.



Spring 1989, Chapter 23

Spring 1989, Chapter 23 Summary

Rickey has formed a gang called the Four Corner Hustlers. They are more like a band of friends as they don't deal in drugs and are all only thirteen or fourteen years old. Rickey and his friends have declared the building as their turf and have taken over an abandoned apartment that they use as a clubhouse, complete with a couch, television, and VCR. To LaJoe's displeasure, Lafeyette spends a lot of time with Rickey. She considers him to be a bad influence on her son but Lafeyette refuses to stop seeing him. Rickey is becoming more troubled. He and his friends have started drinking red wine and smoking marijuana. They also play with guns. One day, one of the boys is shot in the arm while they are playing when high on marijuana. The boy refuses to tell the police who shot him. Rickey confides in Lafeyette that he wishes he were younger and could skip over things that he has done in the past. He also wonders how people feel when they die and is sometimes afraid to go to sleep at night in case he doesn't wake up. Lafeyette likes hanging around with Rickey but not his friends as they always seem ready to fight. He does not consider himself a member of the Four Corner Hustlers even if he hangs out with some of its members. When they are alone, Lafeyette is a positive influence on Rickey and steers him from trouble.

Meanwhile Pharoah has developed a growing interest in politics. LaJoe had the same interest as her mother had been the precinct captain for the Democratic Party when she was a child and she remembers meeting aldermen, representatives, and even senators. But her views of politics have become jaded over the years as, despite promises, nothing changes in Horner Homes. Five months earlier, a black mayoral candidate named Tim Evans visited Henry Horner. Pharoah, eager for another rally, joined the crowd. Someone began throwing stones at Evans and the crowd dispersed but Evans returned the next day. Pharoah also went to hear him and Jesse Jackson speak at the First Congregational Baptist Church where he started fantasizing about becoming a politician.

The violence never stops at Henry Horner. One April afternoon, LaJoe hears a group of people running past the building. She looks out and sees two youth chasing and beating a man of around thirty. She and Lafeyette go outside and yell at the boys to stop beating the man. But they discover that he was molesting one of the boys' cousins in a vacant apartment. The man manages to run away and Lafeyette joins the boys who are chasing him. When he returns, he tells LaJoe the "raper man" ran into a liquor store and jokes that maybe it's a "raper man's club". LaJoe does not find it funny.

Spring 1989, Chapter 23 Analysis

Although Rickey's gang does not deal in drugs it is like a training ground for the real thing. The alcohol and marijuana use can have dangerous consequences, as the



accidental shooting of the boy's arm shows. Lafayette knows enough to stay away from these boys but wants to keep seeing Rickey as they get on well. They understand each other and are able to confide about difficult subjects like death. LaJoe's concerns are well founded as Rickey is a trouble maker and she has even witnesses him committing a theft. However, her voice is powerless against Lafayette's will. Pharoah's interest in politics and secret fantasy to be a politician reflects his desire to be powerful and affect change. While LaJoe is jaded, Pharoah has the innocence and capacity for hope.



Spring 1989, Chapter 24

Spring 1989, Chapter 24 Summary

In the suburb of Skokie, Judge Mahan presides over cases overflowing from the Chicago courts. He is tough on crime. He is ready to hear Terrence's plea bargain case but Terrence, along with other prisoners, is still en route from Cook County Jail. The judge calls a recess which gives Audrey, Terrence's public defender, time to talk to the prosecution. She finally gets to see the line-up photos from the first robbery case which Terrence insists he wasn't involved in. Terrence is the youngest, shortest suspect so she is not surprised he was picked out of the line as he is the only one close to matching the description of the robber. She convinces the prosecution to reduce the sentence from ten years to eight. If Terrence accepts it, he could be out in four years with good behavior. Terrence had asked his mother not to come to the sentencing as he knows how worried she gets every time she sees him in court. On her last court visit, LaJoe brought Pharoah with her. He was curious as he had never been in a courtroom and also wanted to see his brother. He kept a smile on his face when they had a chance to visit Terrence afterward. Pharoah was determined to keep spirits lifted no matter how bad he felt. Terrence had been lifting weights and was now very muscular and buffed. When he got home, Pharoah imitated and described Terrence's muscle man physique to Lafayette.

Terrence finally arrives and is led into the courtroom. Audrey has told him of the plea bargain and he is uncertain of what to do until he talks to his mother. If his case goes to trial, he could face a lot more time. The judge agrees to a two week continuance so Terrence can seek his mother's advice. Meanwhile, LaJoe waits for news and assumes Terrence agreed to the ten year sentence. She can't bear the idea of him being in jail for so long. She is so tense, she finally snaps. A man in his late forties, who she only knows as Keith, has been coming onto her in recent weeks. He is often high on the hallucinogenic PCP. This day, Keith threatens to bash her head in because she ignores his flirtations. She screams at him to go ahead. She's ready for a fight. Later she tells her oldest son Weasel about the incident. Without hesitation he finds Keith, drags him back for LaJoe to identify, and beats him up.

LaJoe is still at a breaking point and rants to the world she's "not going to put up with this" as the smaller children return from school. Pharoah ducks into the kitchen with Tyisha where they set up a Monopoly board and pretend to play. Lafayette slumps down in a chair as LaJoe paces in her fury. She worries about what could have happened with Keith had Weasel not been around. Lafayette makes a snide comment about all the older siblings and their friends who are living at the home. For a moment, LaJoe contemplates running away with the five younger children, but she has nowhere to go. She spends more nights out playing card games, her only escape from the chaos and troubles at home. Her children manage without her on mornings when she has still not returned. Lafayette takes over, ironing clothes for the triplets and walking them to school. The triplets know that their mother will always be there to pick them up from



school. They all worry about something bad happening to their mother. She is all they have.

Three days before Terrence's sentencing, Lafayette, Pharoah, and other family members, including their father, visit him. LaJoe plans to go later in the day. Lafayette wears Terrence's suit, which he wore to Craig's funeral. Terrence is happy to see his brother looking so grown up. Terrence insists that no one come to his sentencing as he doesn't want his family to see him being taken away. Terrence is sentenced on April 4th, which is also the day of the mayoral election in Chicago. Richard M. Daley becomes mayor. LaJoe will always remember it as "sentencing and election day". Although the two events have nothing to do with each other, LaJoe wonders if politicians could not do more to help children like Terrence. She cannot stop thinking about him. She rationalizes that at least he is off the streets and safe but she knows prison will harden him. She only shares her feelings with Rochelle as she doesn't want to burden Lafayette with her worries anymore. Three days after his sentencing, LaJoe receives a letter from Terrence assuring her he is okay and telling her how much he loves her and to be strong. Lafayette and Pharoah miss their older brother but realize he will be gone for a long time so stop asking when he will be home again. Pharoah has a dream in which Terrence confronts a monster that is chasing him. When he wakes, he remembers his brother is in jail and starts worrying again.

Spring 1989, Chapter 24 Analysis

Terrence must accept the fate of so many inner city poor youth who get involved with crime and drugs on the streets at a young age. He tries to be stoic for his family but the long prison sentence takes its toll on all the family members. LaJoe is especially troubled with guilt and despair and, given her pressures, it is not surprising she snaps. She is frightened that her younger boys will suffer a similar fate, especially Lafayette. But she doesn't have an answer to the problem. There is nowhere she can run to in her circumstances. She is wise enough to stop sharing her worries with Lafayette, realizing he has enough of his own. Pharoah's dream expresses his fears about not having his older brother around for protection. The monster represents the evils that surround him which Pharoah feels incapable of confronting on his own.



Spring 1989, Chapter 25

Spring 1989, Chapter 25 Summary

Pharoah warns his friends of human-headed cats in the building's basement. It is not a far stretch of the imagination considering what Gwen Anderson, the newly appointed housing manager of Horner, finds down there. The smell of rotting animal carcasses and feces is so powerful, she vomits. She writes a memo to her superiors at the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) about all the appliances, some still in cartons, that are rusted from being in pools of water or have been vandalized in the fifteen years since they were stored there. All the locks to the storage areas have been broken. There are rodents, live and dead cats, filthy clothes, rusted kitchen cabinets, garbage galore, roaches, and fleas. She mentions that despite intensive efforts to secure the storage areas, they are accessible to anyone.

For fifteen years the residents have been living over this stench. When LaJoe was a child, she and her sisters would attend Girl Scout meetings and dances or roller-skating parties in the basement. Politicians would meet there with residents. The basement's condition explains the putrid odor coming from their toilets and the sewage back-up in the sink. The deteriorating building parallels the deterioration of the neighborhood. There are now 699 vacancies, 188 more than a year ago, further fueling rumors that the city plans to tear the buildings down for a new stadium. In the spring a wading pool, formed by an open fire hydrant in front of LaJoe's building, becomes a bottomless gulch. A boy nearly drowns when he falls through an open sewer but is luckily pulled out by friends. Despite the near drowning, it takes the CHA three months to add a manhole cover. The local health center has gone bankrupt and with the closure of the nearest hospital, residents are forced to go to Cook County Hospital with its incredibly long lines and terrible conditions. A neighborhood corner market has also closed down as the owner was tired of the daily robberies. The Boys Club indoor swimming pool is having troubles and will be shut down for repairs. Two new buildings three blocks from Horner are the only evidence of wealth. One is a luxury home with a marble staircase, sunken tub and Jacuzzi. The owners run multi-state drug network but are eventually arrested and all their property, including this home, is seized.

Pharoah and Porkchop go to visit Dawn. Despite her high school degree, little has happened in a year and she is very depressed. She has applied for numerous jobs but is still on welfare. Her boyfriend, Demetrius, is still with her and takes care of the children when she attends college classes. A former gang member, his friends tease him by calling him "the nanny". Dawn and Demetrius sleep on a mattress on the floor while their four children share two beds. Pharoah asks Dawn questions about college and why she is still living at Horner. He grows worried that even if he achieves a high school degree, he will not be able to get out of the projects. Dawn assures him she is trying. Pharoah leaves by saying "Have a nice day," his current favorite expression.



Spring 1989, Chapter 25 Analysis

The deterioration of the neighborhood and building reflect the deterioration of LaJoe's spirit. The basement which once carried fond memories is now a putrid nightmare. The discovery of all the old appliances, which could have been put to good use but must now be thrown out, illustrates the ineffectiveness and ineptness of the CHC bureaucracy. The increasing number of empty units gives credence to the rumor that the buildings will be torn down, in which case the current residents would be dispersed to other projects. Dawn's inability to get out of the projects dampens Pharoah's spirits. Along with other family members, he had high hopes for her and now worries there is nothing one can do to get out of Horner. Although meant earnestly, his expression, "Have a nice day" is ironic given the not so nice conditions of daily living.



Summer 1989, Chapter 26

Summer 1989, Chapter 26 Summary

On May 19th LaJoe and Rochelle decorate the apartment. After Pharoah mentions he had never had a party, LaJoe plans a surprise birthday party for him. The last few weeks have been good for the Rivers. LaJoe was able to make the last down payment on used bunk beds for the children plus a good table and chairs. Lafayette also replaces the broken door to their bedroom with one he finds in an abandoned unit and adds a lock so only he and Pharoah can go in or out. Lafayette returns with the triplets and other small children. Pharoah soon appears and is truly stunned by the surprise. He goes into his room with a big smile. LaJoe gives him his present, a green shorts set. He puts them on and spends thirty minutes grooming before joining the party. It's mostly younger children, though Porkchop is supposed to show up. Rickey appears and wishes Pharoah happy birthday, but he and Lafayette soon leave. Pharoah has a good time regardless and can't stop smiling. Finally Porkchop shows up. Soon after, his sister Dawn runs into the apartment and warns LaJoe to keep the children inside as there is gang activity going on in the next building. Fortunately, nothing happens.

Pharoah is in good spirits as he has been selected to recite a short poem at his school's year end assembly. He has spent a lot of time memorizing the poem and his stuttering has become almost imperceptible. LaJoe arrives early and is as excited as Pharoah. She believes he will be the one to do well and get out of the projects. Lafayette sits with his class and is proud of his brother. Right before he is to read his poem, Pharoah has to go to the bathroom like crazy but is determined not to wet his pants on the stage. He reads his poem well and receives a loud applause. He and all his siblings except Lafayette receive special awards. Proud as a peacock, LaJoe pins the ribbons on her sweatshirt and wears them the rest of the day. Pharoah also discovers he is one of twenty students chosen for a special summer class in a program called Upward Bound, which operates at the University of Illinois. When asked by the group what he wants to be when he grows up, he says a congressman so he can move people from the projects to real homes. He knows he will be safe in that job as there are always security officers around. Once in the program, Pharoah comes home every day with stories about life on campus and tells LaJoe how he plans to go to college there.

But the violence signaling the onset of summer soon erupts. One day LaJoe and Rochelle are walking to the corner store when they see two teenagers they know, dressed in the red Vice Lords colors. Behind them, two young boys around ten and a young man are following. LaJoe shouts at the teenagers to warn them. She sees the young man hand a gun to one of the boys and overhears him say, "Go kill the motherfucker." The boy shoots but misses the teenagers, who run away unhurt. The incident shakes and upsets LaJoe. At home she takes the red Louisville cap off Lafayette's head and tells him he cannot wear hats or earrings anymore. She is putting her foot down.



Summer 1989, Chapter 26 Analysis

Most of this chapter offers a sense of hope. LaJoe has finally paid off the bunk beds and other furniture she has had on layaway for over a year and has made Pharoah happy with a surprise birthday party. She also takes pride in how well Pharoah and the triplets are doing in school and believes strongly that Pharoah can make it in life. Pharoah also sees hope for the future. With a child's innocence he believes he can change the lives of people in places like Horner Homes for the better if he becomes a politician. The shooting incident LaJoe witnesses is a sad reminder that there will be more violence in the coming summer months. Determined not to lose her children to gangs or gunfire, she is firm with Lafayette in an attempt to protect him.



Summer 1989, Chapter 27

Summer 1989, Chapter 27 Summary

In late May Vincent Lane, the new head of the CHA, holds a meeting with the Henry Horner tenants' association. Vincent Lane has little experience in politics or the government sector having worked mostly as a residential home developer yet he seems fully vested in making significant changes. He knows he will have to deal with the CHA's terrible reputation and mismanagement issues but it is worse than he imagined. Despite the memo, he has not heard about the basement situation until the Horner residents inform him. Someone at the CHA hid the memo to protect their job. Vincent wants to clean out all the basements, replace stolen heating coils, and other repair projects but there isn't enough funding available. He is determined to somehow find it. His first act is to conduct building sweeps to try to get rid of the gangs. Housing managers soon become targets of violence. Despite various efforts, the shooting continues. Pharoah hopes his building will have a sweep and thinks it would be a good idea if people had to show identification cards to enter. One night as gunfire erupts, LoJoe wakes to find Pharoah crawling to the safe place in the hallway. He later tells a friend he is afraid of dying, especially young, and of his yearning to get out of the projects.

Summer 1989, Chapter 27 Analysis

Vincent Lane offers some hope of improvement after years of corruption and mismanagement at the CHA but it is a daunting task that will take time to achieve. Unlike his predecessors, he makes the effort to visit tenant groups at all the housing projects on a regular basis to hear their stories and complaints. The more he hears, the more shocking the stories and more difficult the challenges seem. He feels if he can remove the gang factor it will be easier to manage the situation. The sweeps are relatively ineffective as the gangs hear about the raids ahead of time and simply move location. The threats on his life and violence against the building managers add to the aggravation of finding solutions. Pharoah clings to the hope of being safe from the gangs but the shootings continue. He is truly fearful of dying as a child - he believes he might be able to control and affect things as a politician if he can just make it to adulthood.



Summer 1989, Chapter 28

Summer 1989, Chapter 28 Summary

Lafayette is nervous about an upcoming court date. Four weeks earlier he was arrested for allegedly breaking into a truck near the stadium and taking some goods, along with four other boys. Lafayette claims he did not know the boys and was just walking by when the incident happened. He was worried he would get blamed so ran for home but was picked up by the police before he made it. He packs his clothes away as Pharoah watches, worried he won't be coming home. Lafayette no longer wears hats or earrings. Rickey has been arrested for snatching a chain from a motorist stopped at a traffic light. Lafayette has been spending much more time at home as he doesn't trust the outside world. However, being cooped up in a noisy, sweaty apartment isn't easy. LaShawn is constantly disappearing, leaving her children in the care of her siblings or LaJoe. Lafayette suspects she is taking drugs again.

LaJoe goes with Lafayette to the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center a mile and a half south of Horner. LaJoe has frequented the center many times with Terrence and worries a pattern is repeating. The hearing is set for one-thirty but Lafayette's name doesn't appear on the docket. They wait for hours amidst confusion over his case. Finally at six o'clock, they are the last ones called into court. The judge doesn't even look up as he bombards Lafayette with questions and clearly doesn't believe his version of events. A trial date is set for September 8th. As they leave the room LaJoe realizes Lafayette was given a different court case to the other boys involved in the theft and returns to ask the judge about it. It's only been a few minutes but the judge has already forgotten the case and Lafayette's name. LaJoe feels as if nobody cares enough to treat them like human beings. Lafayette is relieved to be going home. LaJoe receives a letter from Terrence who seems down but assures her he is fine. Pharoah and Lafayette like to read Terrence's letters but talk about him less, knowing he will be gone for a long time. LaJoe tells the boys she is going to try and move so Terrence won't have to return to Horner.

Summer 1989, Chapter 28 Analysis

The court system is impersonal and overwhelmed like so many agencies Horner residents must contend with. LaJoe does her best to navigate the system for Lafayette but it is a frustrating, unkind experience. She is worried about Lafayette following in Terrence's footsteps but at least he is spending less time on the streets. Lafayette's distrust of authorities is increasing with each encounter. He is terrified of going to jail though barely expresses emotions about it. It is evident in his actions when he packs away his clothes and his almost inaudible responses when questioned in court. He is relieved when he gets to go home as the trial date seems far away.



Summer 1989, Chapter 29

Summer 1989, Chapter 29 Summary

Early in the summer, Weasel gives Pharoah and Lafayette two pit bull puppies. Pharoah soon loses interest and gives his away but Lafayette enjoys having a puppy. When he used to hang around with Bird Leg he always imagined having a dog of his own. One day he comes home and can't find his puppy. Only his mother and father are home. He grows agitated and accuses his father of selling the puppy for drugs. Incensed, Paul shouts at Lafayette, leading to a fist fight. LaJoe breaks it up long enough for Lafayette to run out of the apartment. But he soon returns with an iron chain and tells his father to come outside to fight. At first Paul seems ready, but he realizes his son is right. Drugs destroyed his relationship with LaJoe and now they are destroying it with his children. Instead of fighting he backs down and sits on the couch, Lafayette's accusations weighing heavily on his soul. Lafayette finds the puppy hiding under the stove.

Every morning Pharoah wakes up with a sense of energy and excitement. He enjoys going to the University of Illinois and being considered a scholar. But Lafayette is despondent. He ignores his father whenever he is around and always seems on edge. He has stopped confiding in LaJoe or anyone else. One evening in July LaJoe walks past a group of boys taunting a fourteen year old. She hears Lafayette shouting to the boys to leave his friend alone. LaJoe runs to the boys and yells at them to stop, but they continue beating the fourteen-year old. Finally a friend of Weasel appears and intervenes and the boys disperse. After the incident Lafayette's face is devoid of emotion. As they near the porch, Lafayette drops to his knees and tells his mother he is tired. She knows he means he is tired of life.

Meanwhile, Dawn is served an eviction notice and has to move with all her children into a single room at her mother's apartment across the street. Demetrius sleeps wherever he can, sometimes in the back of his car. Pharoah worries about growing up. He thinks when he's older he'll understand things better but prefers not understanding. LaJoe notices that Lafayette has put Craig's funeral program on his wall. She realizes Lafayette is still grieving for his friend and thinks maybe it will help him. She soon takes it down when he starts having nightmares. In them, someone is chasing him but because of a strong wind, he can't run away. When he tries to call for help, nothing comes out of his mouth.

Summer 1989, Chapter 29 Analysis

Lafayette and Paul's relationship is becoming tenser. Lafayette blames his father's drug habit for their problems and his lost puppy is an excuse to unload his anger and resentment. Paul feels like a failure and recognizes that drugs have destroyed his relationships with his family. However, he seems powerless to change the circumstance. Pharoah is the only family member who is making positive progress. He finds the



summer program stimulating and it provides a calm and nurturing place outside of the projects. Dawn's eviction is disturbing, however. It makes Pharoah further question his own ability to ever leave Horner Homes. Lafayette is growing more despondent and depressed. When he sinks to his knees it is like he has given up on life. His nightmares reflect the powerlessness he feels. In them, he cannot run or speak, as he cannot escape the projects or have a voice against the complex and dangerous challenges he faces.



Summer 1989, Chapter 30

Summer 1989, Chapter 30 Summary

One day after a heavy rain, Lafayette convinces Pharoah to go to a nearby hot dog stand called Main Street for French fries. They run into Rickey on the way and invite him to join them. They rarely see Rickey as he has been in and out of juvenile detention and is reportedly running drugs for older boys. They sit with their food outside the stand. Pharoah sees something so marvelous his excitement makes him stammer. He points to a rainbow in the sky. None of the boys have ever seen one. Pharoah thinks if they chase it they might find gold or leprechauns at the end. Lafayette thinks it's a stupid idea but Rickey agrees to go with Pharoah. They run for many blocks but the rainbow starts to fade. Pharoah makes a final sprint but the rainbow vanishes. He is thoroughly disappointed. He had imagined how he would use a pot of gold or a wish to help his family out of the projects. Lafayette later admits he wondered if there might be something at the end of the rainbow. He wants to believe in such things and be able to dream and imagine.

Summer 1989, Chapter 30 Analysis

In this short chapter, the rainbow reflects the brothers' dreams and wishes but, as with all their hopes, it is elusive and seemingly unattainable, a wonderful momentary illusion that fades away. Pharoah has more capacity to imagine the possibilities of a better life than his brother but is consequently more devastated when those dreams amount to nothing.



September 29, 1989, Chapter 31

September 29, 1989, Chapter 31 Summary

LaJoe and Lafayette enter the detention center for Lafayette's court hearing. She assures Lafayette they will not keep him but her son is dubious. Lafayette is on crutches having torn a ligament falling down a flight of stairs. They go into a room and sit with the other four boys accused of the same crime. Lafayette barely knows them. One boy, Derrick, is the one Lafayette saw break into the truck. Soon their public defender, Anne Rhodes, calls them into a small courtroom to explain their options. She is tall and intimidating so Lafayette dislikes her right away. He doesn't know that she has a real concern for the children and believes most of them are innocent. She is simply overwhelmed with cases and can only spare a few minutes for each one. Later she returns and says the man whose truck was broken into will agree to drop the case if each family pays \$100 restitution for the damage. The families refuse as they can't afford it. Anne expects this response and knows that in an ideal world, each child would have their own lawyer with at least a few days to prepare their cases. She meets with the boys alone and realizes most of them are innocent. She thinks she has a good chance for an acquittal. Soon after, the boys are called into a courtroom. Judge Dempsey presides. The boys line up nervously in front of him.

The trial lasts about twenty minutes. The truck owner, Michael Berger, testifies that Derrick had asked for cash to watch his truck to which he replied "no". Derrick responded by saying he would hate for anything to happen to his truck. It is the young prosecuting attorney's first case. She thinks she will be lucky if the judge at least finds Derrick guilty. After testimony from the police, Anne Rhodes cross-examines the witnesses. She points out that no one saw the truck broken into and the officers' accounts of what happened varied. The boys give their testimonies rather unconvincingly as they don't recall many details from that night four months ago. To everyone's surprise, the judge believes they are a threat to the public and finds them all guilty. A deposition date is set for the following month. Lafayette is relieved that they didn't lock him up but is furious at being accused for a crime he didn't commit. When Pharoah returns home, he is relieved to find his brother there. Before long, LaJoe hears Pharoah and Lafayette arguing over a shirt. She smiles because at least she still has both of them.

September 29, 1989, Chapter 31 Analysis

Lafayette's day in court is another example of the unequal, ineffective representation, and lack of resources that poor inner city citizens must contend with in court. The overburdened judicial system does not allow for adequate preparation time for individual cases or for public defenders to spend more than a few minutes with their clients. The process operates like a meat market with little sense of humanity. Lafayette is angry that the judge believes he is guilty but he has seen his older brother falsely accused of a

crime and realizes there is little justice in their world and he is powerless to do anything about it. Despite the hardship, LaJoe is grateful that she has managed to keep Lafayette and Pharoah free from harm and the streets for this long.



Epilogue

Epilogue Summary

Lafayette is given a year's probation and is required to perform a hundred hours of community service at the Boys Club. He enjoys working with small children but his troubles don't end with probation. The author helps both brothers get into a private parochial school named Providence-St. Mel. The school is strict but the children are financially rewarded if they make the honor roll. It is a hundred percent black with three quarters of the children from the neighborhood. Over ninety percent of each graduating class goes on to college. A year later Pharoah is thriving at the school but Lafayette drops out and returns to public school as he finds the work too challenging. At least he has learned a lot and developed an enthusiasm for the Aztecs and various books. He also has learned to ask for help, something which was always a challenge for him. After a few months in public school Lafayette finds it hard to avoid the lure of the streets. He is caught smoking marijuana with much older boys and on occasion plays hookey. He promises his mother he will do better but LaJoe knows this is not a neighborhood where kids can afford to make mistakes, so she keeps a close eye on him. In June 1990 Lafayette, now fifteen, graduates from eighth grade. He is happy and at ease at the ceremony and manages to laugh and smile with pride. He plans to attend a parochial school that isn't as academically rigorous as Providence-St. Mel.

Over a year after Craig Davis' death his mother plans to file a lawsuit against the ATF. She visits his grave twice a year. It is unmarked as she cannot afford a gravestone. Now fourteen, Rickey is running drugs for a local gang and is frequently in and out of detention. The Four Corner Hustlers are selling drugs and growing, rivaling the Conservative Vice Lords and the Disciples. One thing that hasn't changed in Horner is the level of violence. Many people have been shot including the proprietor of the Main Street hot dog stand. Pharoah is upset as he knew the man well. Fortunately, he survives. LaJoe finds a place to move to but is ripped off in a scam and loses an eighty dollar deposit. She is depressed and humiliated at the outcome as the family has been bragging about the move for a long time.

A few things do improve in the neighborhood, thanks to Vance Lane's efforts at CHA. The basements are cleaned out, leaking roofs are repaired, and heating coils replaced. The Rivers' bathtub is finally fixed so it doesn't pour scalding water all day. LaJoe also gets a new stove and paint. At one housing area, Rockwell Gardens, raids have emptied the buildings of gangs and there is round-the-clock security and a new playground. Lane would like to sweep Henry Horner but doesn't have the funds yet. Anti-drug and gang programs have also cropped up. Dawn and Demetrius get their first apartment in the ABLA homes. Dawn becomes pregnant again but cannot afford an abortion so they now have five children. Terrence expects to get out of prison in 1991 and has earned a high school equivalency. Paul, the boys' father, has found a part-time job with a moving company and after the first few days on the job gives LaJoe money to buy the triplets sandals for the July 4th holiday.



Epilogue Analysis

The epilogue is written a year later and covers significant events that have occurred since Lafayette's trial. It is the only time the author, Alex Kotlowitz, mentions any involvement with the children. He describes how he helps the children get into a private, academically challenging school. Pharoah's future looks bright with this new opportunity. He is vested in his education and working hard to achieve his goals. Lafayette has managed to stay out of serious troubles but the temptations on the street linger. Any environmental or security improvements have come from a change in leadership at CHA. Vance Lane has made good on many of his promises and provides a welcome change from previous mismanagement and apathy. LaJoe's goal of moving her children out of the projects seems almost realized yet becomes another big disappointment at the hands of a scam artist. Both the boys' future are uncertain given they are still in the same environment.



Characters

Pharoah Rivers

Pharoah Rivers is one of the two main characters in the book, along with his older brother Lafayette. He is nine years old when the story begins. He is the fifth child in a family of eight children. He lives with his siblings and mother LaJoe in the Henry Horner projects. His father Paul is occasionally around but drugs have destroyed his relationship with LaJoe. Physically, Pharoah is much smaller than children his age. He has slightly buck teeth and a stutter that becomes more apparent under stress. He is an introspective, thoughtful child who spends a lot of time daydreaming about a better life. Violence scares him and he avoids it at all costs. He jumps at any loud noise thinking guns are firing. He has a strong sense of right and wrong and fantasizes about being a politician when he grows up so he can help people in his neighborhood.

Pharoah takes his education very seriously and loves being at school where he feels safe and nurtured. He takes pride in his accomplishments, such as coming in second place in the school spelling bee. He studies very hard and relishes his summer school experience at the University of Illinois when he is ten. It makes him feel important and on his way to success. He finds the chaos and violence around him upsetting and finds secret places where he can relax without fear, such as the grassy area around a nearby condominium complex. He doesn't really understand the world around him and prefers not understanding as it seems overwhelming. Pharoah eventually is enrolled in a parochial private school known for its academic excellence. By the end of the book his future looks promising though uncertain as he still lives in the same environment.

Lafayette Rivers

Lafayette is twelve years old at the start of the book. A lean, gangly boy, he is the fourth oldest child in his family but is the oldest boy consistently living at home. Therefore he takes on a lot of responsibility for his younger siblings. He worries about them constantly. He is inherently bright but not focused on education. He is greatly disturbed by the violence around him especially as friends begin to die. First he loses his friend Bird Leg in a gang altercation. Other children he knows are shot. He greatly admires an older boy, Craig Davis, who he spends a lot of time with. Craig is a positive role model and encourages Lafayette to stay out of gangs and do well in school. When Craig is shot by police in an "accidental homicide", Lafayette becomes depressed, withdrawn and numb. He faces his own troubles with the law. Once he is caught shoplifting with a friend and another time he is accused of vandalism and robbery that he did not commit. In the wrong place at the wrong time he is charged and ultimately found guilty of the crime.

Lafayette's anger and frustration is also rooted in his relationship with his father. He blames his father's drug habit for all their problems and resents the false promises Paul



used to make about getting out of Horner. He is close to his mother and relies on her as much as she relies on him. He feels his mother is too generous and 'weak' for allowing the older siblings and their friends to stay in the apartment and thinks life would be easier without them around. He is also close to his older brother Terrence who is often on the streets or in jail and ends up with a 10 year sentence. Lafayette is given the opportunity to attend Providence-St. Mel with his brother but can't keep up academically. He returns to public school with the goal of going to a less rigorous parochial school the following year. By the end of the story he is still influenced by peer pressure but trying his best to stay away from trouble. Like Pharoah, his future looks uncertain.

LaJoe Rivers

LaJoe is Pharoah and Lafayette's thirty-five year old mother. She has six other children, three older ones who come and go and five young ones at home, including the two brothers and 4-year old triplets. She is kind, shy, and generous to a fault and has guided many children beyond her own so is often called "Mom" on the street. Despite her good nature, the poverty and violence take their toll on LaJoe. Since the age of four, she has seen her neighborhood severely decline from a once relatively peaceful area to one riddled with gangs and drugs. She regrets that her three oldest children did not fare better for all the care she gave them. Aged seventeen to twenty-one, they are all involved in drugs and have spent time in jail. All eight of LaJoe's children were fathered by Paul Rivers, her husband of seventeen years, but as he became more involved in drugs, their relationship has disintegrated. LaJoe hopes her younger children will have more success than the older three but lives in constant fear for their lives. The younger children represent a chance to do things right and she puts tremendous energy into their care.

Paul Rivers

Paul is Lafayette and Pharoah's father. He has been married to their mother for seventeen years and is the father of their six siblings. He used to work but drugs have destroyed much of his life including his relationship with LaJoe and most of his children. He loses his job and becomes increasingly depressed and ineffective. He visits the children now and then to let them know they have a father around and but Lafayette shows his contempt for Paul and his presence is often disturbing. Paul recognizes his faults and failures but seems powerless to change his habits. By the end of the story he has a part-time job and contributes some money to LaJoe for the children.

Terrence Rivers

Terrence is LaJoe's third child. When he was young he had a special bond with his mother, though life was difficult as his parents were in conflict. Regardless, LaJoe had five more children by her husband and Terrence felt neglected. At ten years old he ran



away from home and was taken in and adopted by a drug dealer named Charles. Over the years he is in and out of jail and occasionally goes home. His younger brothers, especially Lafayette, look up to him. At age seventeen, Terrence is charged with a crime he claims he didn't commit and is sent to jail. When he is out on bond he commits an armed robbery he admits to and is charged as an adult. In a plea bargain he agrees to an eight year term with the hope of getting out in four years with good behavior. In jail visits he lectures Lafayette on the importance of getting an education and staying away from gangs. He doesn't want his brothers following in his footsteps.

LaShawn Rivers

At twenty-years old at the start of the book, LaShawn is LaJoe and Paul's oldest child. Like the two brothers born after her, she drops out of school at an early age. She works as a prostitute from time to time to support her drug habit.

She gets pregnant while staying with her mother and gives up drugs in the seventh month. She has a baby boy named DeShaun. As he shows signs of opiates in his body, Child Services intervene before he is allowed home. Over the next few years she goes back to the streets and often leaves her baby in her siblings or mother's care without them knowing when she will return.

Paul "Weasel" Rivers

Weasel is LaJoe's oldest son. He has served time for burglary and is not home often. On one occasion when a drug addict threatens to bash LaJoe's head in, Weasel beats the man up. He loves and cares for his family but his attention is on the streets.

The Triplets

LaJoe's youngest children are four year-old triplets Timothy, Tiffany, and Tammy. They are often present but not explored much in the story. They are often under Lafayette's care when their mother is out.

Leila Mae (Grandmother)

Leila Mae is LaJoe's mother. She moves in with her daughter and grandchildren for a short while. She has suffered a stroke so is partially paralyzed. Lafayette is closest to her and helps her with bathing and errands. After a shooting altercation in the home, Leila Mae moves out as she is tired of the chaos and violence.



Calvin "Bird Leg" Robinson

Bird Leg gets his nickname from a leg injury after being hit by a drunk driver. After months of recovery, his injured leg looks so thin and fragile that his grandmother remarks it looks like a bird leg. As a child, Bird Leg has a fascination with dogs and with Lafayette's help, steals them or collect strays, which he keeps in an abandoned garage. Bird Leg becomes involved in the Vice Lords gangs and at the age of fifteen is shot by a rival gang. His death deeply affects Lafayette as the first of many losses.

Craig Davis

Craig is an eighteen-year old Lafayette idolizes. He stays away from drugs and gangs and encourages children to do likewise. His ambition is to graduate high school, go to college, and become a radio deejay. He deejays parties for the Horner residents in the summer and at the local Boys Club. He lives in a neighboring project but has a girlfriend who lives in the Rivers' building so often frequents the Horner Homes. He has children by another woman and is still part of their lives. Lafayette often visits Craig and reads his poems about life and the importance of education. Craig finally graduates from high school and gets a job as a stock boy at a stationary store. His employers are considering promoting him given his quick abilities and enthusiasm. Craig plans to deejay a Boys Club event he has invited Lafayette to attend. The night before the party he goes out to gather turntables from a friend. He is mistaken by police for a gun smuggler and accidentally shot after being chased and confronted. His death leaves a deep emotional scar with Lafayette who struggles to comprehend the unnecessary loss of his friend.

James Howard

James is Lafayette's best friend at the beginning of the book. They grow up in the same building though James is a year older and far more agile and athletic. They boys often hang out together until James moves away. He occasionally comes back but the geographical distance diminishes the closeness of their relationship over time.

Rickey

Rickey is a tough, aggressive boy who befriends Pharoah when he wants to go out with his cousin, Dede. They are opposites in nature but both find a sense of peace with each other; for Pharoah it is protection, for Rickey it is someone to protect after feeling helpless witnessing his cousin Bird Leg's death. Rickey lives in the Disciples territory of the Horner Homes, while Pharoah is in the Vice Lord's realm and despite all their other contrasts - physical, intellectual, and emotional - they find a common ground that binds them. Rickey is a year and a half older than Pharoah as he is held back for poor grades. In time he and Lafayette become friends but Rickey gets him in trouble after encouraging him to shop lift. Rickey eventually forms a gang and begins running drugs



for older boys. He is in and out of detention for numerous petty crimes. Lafayette and Pharoah still enjoy hanging out with him when he's on his own but are wary of his friends.

Ms. Barone

Ms. Barone is Pharoah's fourth grade teacher. She recognizes Pharoah's potential in reading and writing and encourages him every step of the way. She is nurturing and kind and helps make Pharoah feel special. Ms. Barone's classroom is one of his favorite places as he feels safe and accepted there.

Clarise

Clarise is the smartest student in Pharoah's class. She is a good six inches taller than Pharoah and very confident. They both share a passion for learning and become fast friends while preparing for a spelling bee competition. Clarise helps Pharoah overcome his stutter on difficult words. Clarise and Pharoah win first and second place respectively in the spelling bee but both are delighted for each other's success.

Dawn Anderson

Dawn is Lafayette and Pharoah's niece. She is a rare family member or Horner student to graduate high school and is a role model for her cousins. She has four children under the age of four having become a mother at age fourteen. She lives with her boyfriend Demetrius, who is very supportive and takes care of the children while she is in school. After graduation, Dawn takes college courses but has a hard time finding a job. She remains on welfare and becomes increasingly depressed. She gets pregnant again but cannot afford an abortion. She and Demetrius are eventually evicted from their apartment where they have been living illegally so she moves into a single room at her mother's apartment. Despite all her efforts, her future looks bleak. Her dire situation scares Pharoah as she was once a beacon of hope. It makes him question whether he'll ever be able to get out of the projects, even with a diploma.

Leonard "Porkchop" Anderson

Porkchop, is Dawn's younger brother. He is a shy, nervous boy and spends most of his time hanging out with his cousin Pharoah. When Pharoah withdraws because of his embarrassing stutter, Porkchop is the only one he plays with. Porkchop is quiet and understands Pharoah without the need for words. He is often a quiet presence in Pharoah's life.



Rochelle

Rochelle is LaJoe's best friend. Although Rochelle is younger, they grew up together and became best friends as their mothers had been. Rochelle does not have children but has cared for other children and helps LaJoe with hers. She is like part of the family. Rochelle doesn't collect welfare so lives with her mother and makes money playing card games. Rochelle is LaJoe's foremost confidante in times of trouble.

Jimmy Lee

Thirty-eight year-old Jimmy Lee is head of the Conservative Vice Lords, the gang that runs the Horner Homes. He is a contradictory character, feared by some and respected by others. Despite his drug and gun smuggling profession and numerous deaths as a result of his power, he is charismatic, loves children, and respects women. He has been married to the same woman for twenty years and they have children together. He often gives money and gifts to families in needs and refuses to let children join his gang. He even discourages them from such activities. He never carries drugs or guns to avoid arrest. Eventually he is raided on a tip and the police find drugs, a sawed-off shot gun and drug paraphernalia in his home. To make him an example to gang members in the city he is given a maximum sentence of 30 years in prison.

Vance Lane

The new head of the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) takes over after years of corruption and mismanagement. Despite many challenges, he makes an effort to communicate in person with project tenant groups and affect change in a positive way. Through his leadership, buildings are swept of gangs, security measures put in place, and much needed repairs and renovations implemented.



Objects/Places

Henry Horner Projects

The Chicago housing projects where Pharoah and Lafayette Rivers grow up and where their mother has lived since she was four years old.

The Rivers Apartment

Located at 1920 West Washington Boulevard in Chicago, the Rivers apartment is on the first story of an eighteen floor high rise. The apartment occupies six to thirteen family members and others at any given time and is in dire need of many repairs.

The Railroad Tracks

The tracks near the Horner Homes instill a sense of peace and tranquility in Pharoah when he ventures there with his brother and friends. He constantly searches for such tranquility again.

Damen Court

The grass surrounding the Damen Court condominium complex is Pharoah's secret place where he often goes to be alone and daydream. It reminds him of the tranquility of the tracks.

The Boys Club

Lafayette and Pharoah attend parties and play pool and basketball at the boys club. It is a safe after school place that hosts many events for local youth.

Chicago Stadium

Lafayette and Pharoah make a little cash watching parked cars for people attending the game. Lafayette has an altercation with a racist police officer at a parking garage outside of the stadium.

Henry Suder Elementary School.

The local elementary school that Lafayette, Pharoah and the triplets attend.



Department of Public Aid

This agency provides welfare benefits. They accuse LaJoe of "double dipping" into the system and cut her benefits but eventually the benefits are restored.

Cook County Jail

Terrence is locked up in Cook County Jail while awaiting his court date for armed robbery.

Erol's Video Club

Lafayette and Rickey are caught shoplifting tapes at this video store. The police arrive but the manager doesn't press charges.

Chicago Housing Authority (CHA)

A corrupt, mismanaged and apathetic organization that is only able to affect positive change for the community it is supposed to serve once a new leader, Vance Lane, takes charge.

The Basement

A newly appointed housing manager discovers the Horner high rise basements are a putrid disaster full of once new appliances and cabinets that have rusted or been vandalized, dead and living cats, rodents, garbage, dirty clothes, feces, roaches and fleas. The CHA has neglected the basements and all the items originally stored there for the tenants' benefit for fifteen years.

Upward Bound

A summer school program Pharoah is chosen to attend, located at the University of Illinois.

Juvenile Temporary Detention Center

This is the over-burdened juvenile detention center where Lafayette is tried on a vandalism and burglary charge. All children from Horner accused of crimes are tried here.



Providence-St. Mel

This is a private and academically successful parochial school for inner city black youth. The author of the book helps Lafayette and Pharoah get into the school. Lafayette drops out but Pharoah stays committed.



Themes

Coming of Age

Lafayette and Pharoah Rivers come of age amidst poverty, violence, and racism. Their individuality is molded by their unique personalities and these outside influences. At the beginning of the story Pharoah is very childlike. He is introspective, imaginative, and fearful. He dreams about getting out of the projects and doesn't understand the adult world around him. He fears gangs, gunshots, and any form of violence and will run and hide rather than try to defend himself. As he matures he puts his energies into education. In this arena he feels confident and successful. He sees a door that could potentially lead him out of the cycle of poverty. By the end of the book, Pharoah is fully vested in his education with the hope of becoming a politician so one day he can affect real change for others in his predicament. Lafayette's growth is quite different. At the beginning he is already sullen and wary from his experiences in the projects but retains a childlike quality. He is protective of his siblings and shoulders much of the family responsibility. As the story progresses, he suffers one personal loss after another including friends to gang violence and his brother to prison. He becomes more embittered, angry, and emotionally numb. His encounters with the police at the stadium and with his arrest make him more suspicious and angry. He discovers his own mortality but feels powerless over it and believes he could die or go to prison regardless of his actions. While he struggles to do the right thing he is increasingly tempted by life on the streets and, unlike his brother, his focus is on daily survival rather than future goals. By the end of the novel Lafayette is hardened through his experiences and has lost any childlike qualities. There is a strong possibility he will succumb to negative influences, despite his family support and opportunities provided.

Poverty, Violence, and Racism

The subtitle of the book is "The Story of Two Boys Growing Up in the Other America". Poor inner city communities are an alien concept to most middle class or rural communities. While there is sympathy and frustration about the living conditions of this group of people, there is also a sense of apathy and neglect. Media stories usually ignore violent crimes in the projects while they are fixated on white, middle class crimes. As mentioned in the book, the school shooting in the affluent suburb of Winnetka receives weeks of intense coverage while similar shootings at Henry Horner are virtually ignored. The physical structure of the projects also alienates the community as if it is a separate island that only gets noticed if it affects the greater community.

The majority of residents in housing projects across America are black. Therefore, stereotypes about black urban poor perpetuate. Outsiders often don't understand why they are incapable of bettering their situation with so many opportunities available. It is seen as a 'black' problem rather than a national problem. Politics also tends to ignore this group as politicians tend to cater to middle class voters. It is a problem everyone



wants to disappear but few have the answers or courage to address. The author gives a thorough historical, social, and political, and contemporary perspective on the all the contributing factors that have led to the failures of managing poverty and crime in these communities. Some of these factors include a lack of planning, mismanaged and overburdened government agencies, a lack of funding and security in education, a lack of public interest, a lack of trust and fear between the community and law enforcement, greed on the part of developers, fear of business owners, and more. Through the portrayal of daily living for one family, the author successfully illustrates how all these obstacles come into play and perpetuate the cycle of poverty and violence.

Life and Death

The exploration of life and death are central to the brothers' coming of age in this book. Lafayette and Pharoah witness or hear about death on a constant basis. Like other children in the projects, they often wonder if they will reach adulthood. They are both fearful of dying young. Lafayette is more profoundly consumed with issues of life and death after the loss of several friends. Bird Leg's shooting death in a gang altercation leaves him feeling numb and depressed. Craig Davis' death has a much deeper effect as it seems so unjust. Craig was a role model who always gave Lafayette positive messages about education and staying away from gangs. Ironically, he is killed by police who mistake him for a gang member. His death seems a waste and leads Lafayette to conclude that whatever his actions, he can be killed anyway. This sense of powerlessness makes him increasingly edgy, distant, and devoid of emotions.

Pharoah also feels powerless and is confused by his world. He hangs onto his childhood, preferring not to understand as that knowledge could be frightening. He also internalizes his emotions in a world of daydreams and introspection. He has a healthier attitude than his brother and finds safe places such as the grassy area at Damen Court to sort through his feelings. LaJoe is constantly under stress fearing for the lives of her children. The pressure is at times overwhelming and she can find no solution so vents her anger in outbursts directed at children. She resents her husband for not being able to help her cope with the problems due to his drug addiction. Her dreams of moving her children to a safer neighborhood have withered as harsh realities block every opportunity. Given the dangers, many children in the projects take life one day at a time with little focus on the future. This sense of vulnerability and hopelessness is what tempts many of them into gangs. At least in a gang there is a sense of purpose and control, especially if the gun is in your hand rather than someone else's. Thus, the cycle of violence and poverty continue.



Style

Perspective

Alex Kotlowitz was working as a freelance journalist when he met Lafayette and Pharoah Rivers. He interviewed them for text to accompany a photo essay on children in poverty to appear in Chicago magazine. Two years later he returned to Henry Horner for a summer to write an article on children and violence for The Wall Street Journal. He became good friends with the boys, often taking them on outings and summer fishing trips. In 1988 he approached their mother with the idea of writing a book about her sons and other children in Henry Horner. She agreed though said, "There are no children here," which became the title of the book. The author witnessed about fifty percent of the scenes in the book and the rest he re-created from interviews so they are dramatic renditions based on fact or other people's interpretation or recollection of events. Much of the book is written in an investigative manner using documentation, reports, and news sources to back up the validity of certain events, such as the shooting of Craig Davis. The author's intention was to bring attention to the plight of inner city children living in poverty with daily violence and negative temptations. By highlighting the dangers through the eyes of the children, the book takes on a personal perspective that evokes sympathy from the reader.

Tone

The book has a journalistic tone married with some dramatic narrative. The tone shifts between objective and subjective. The historical and fact-based descriptions of the neighborhood, bureaucratic agencies, crimes statistics, gang structures and so forth are highly objective and based on numerous cross-referenced sources. This exposition would become dry without the more subjective tone provided by the focus on the main characters. At this point the tone becomes a little more subjective as the author has an obvious empathy toward the characters. The dialogue and scenes are fairly accurate according to the author but he uses his own interpretation to describe the children's feelings and emotions. He knows the characters well enough that it is a plausible perspective and one that allows the reader to have an emotional response. This is important since the themes in the book revolve around the brothers' coming of age and their subsequent growth and change. The non-linear fashion of the book with the use of flashbacks would be difficult to follow if the reader was not immersed in the characterizations.

Structure

This novel is comprised of thirty-one chapters of different lengths, averaging around ten pages. The chapters are grouped into seasons including Summer 1987, Fall 1987 - Spring 1988, Summer 1988, Fall 1988 - Winter 1989, Spring 1989, Summer 1989, and



September 29, 1989. The story is told chronologically but is non-linear as there are many flashbacks to earlier events as well historical, social and political perspectives. Since the book is based on a true story it does not follow traditional dramatic narrative with a major plot or defined goals. Rather, it is a glimpse in time that follows a two-year period in the life of two brothers who come of age in a deprived and violent inner city neighborhood. Therefore there is not a neat, tidy ending and readers may not appreciate the ambiguity at the end of the story.

The pacing shifts in tempo as the narrative switches between dramatic events to fact-based perspectives. The boys' lives are essentially a personal reflection of multiple social issues facing inner city communities. Through their eyes and stories, the bigger picture is revealed in a personal way. The story is accessible for youth and adults and is given its power through the insights of the two young brothers who readers come to care about.

Setting

The novel is set in the Henry Horner projects in Chicago from the summer of 1987 to the fall of 1989. Built in 1956, the Henry Horner complex includes sixteen public high rise buildings that spread over eight city blocks on the west side of Chicago. The buildings were constructed cheaply with open breezeways cutting through the buildings instead of lobbies and boiler systems that are constantly in need of repair. The apartment walls are cinder block. The residents are predominantly black and poor with little education or opportunity. Most are second or third generation tenants. The schools and social agencies are located on the edge of the projects.

Lafayette and Pharoah occasionally wander outside the projects. There are railroad tracks nearby where they go to look for garter snakes. Pharoah loves the tranquility of the setting. Pharoah finds another special, quiet place, a grassy patch at a condominium complex a few blocks away.

The only settings outside the Horner projects or immediate surrounding area include the courthouse in the suburb of Skokie where Terrence is tried and downtown Chicago which is only a mile away. One winter day when LaJoe can't bear the scorching heat blasting through the furnaces, she takes a group of young children on a bus downtown to see the holiday decorations and window displays. Although it is so close, it is a rare treat for the children to travel that far.



Quotes

"The narrow hall of their four-bedroom apartment had become their fallout shelter." Chap. 3, p. 26.

"There are a lot of people in the projects who say they're not gonna do drugs, that they're not gonna drop out, that they won't be on the streets. But they're doing it now. Never say never." Chap. 3, p. 29.

"Lafayette and Pharoah, as well as the adults, began talking of the "death train" that drove smack through their community." Chap. 4, p. 42.

"We're gonna die one way or another by killing or plain out." Chap. 5, p. 51.

"His face masked his troubles. It was a face without effect, without emotion." Chap. 6, p. 55.

"I just see when Bird Leg just bent down and almost tripped over the chain, then just lay down. I just catch myself right there. If I kill someone, it seem like I'm taking them on for the person who killed Bird Leg." Chap. 8, p. 73.

"I worry about Pharoah a lot," Lafayette explained. "I don't want anything to happen to him, because he's my little brother. I'm supposed to watch after him. He makes me mad at times but I still love him." Chap. 8, p. 75.

"With all that swirled about Pharoah this winter, the death of his two fish seemed incidental. But it was, at least, one crisis he could deal with himself, one that he could comprehend." Chap. 9, p. 78.

"Laveyette believed that the only person he could depend on was his mother, and he would do anything to protect her." Chap. Ten, p. 98.

"I've got to keep smiling to keep from crying," LaJoe counseled herself. "If I ever slow down, I'll lose it." Chap. 10, p. 105.

"The things that I did. I want you to be better. You won't be like me. You better than me." Chap. 11, p. 109.

"She had been stabbed forty-eight times and left for dead." Chap. 14, p. 133.

"You don't have any friends in the projects," he said. "They'll turn you down for anything." Chap. 16, p. 154.

"Little punk, you ain't supposed to be working here. These white people don't have no money to give no niggers." Chap. 17, p. 160.



"I ain't doing nothing. I could get killed, or if not get killed I might go to jail for something I didn't do. I could die any minute, so I ain't gong to be scared of anything." Chap. 21. p. 209.

"The violence never let up. What's more, no one ever got used to it." Chap. 23, p. 224.

"It was everyone's worst nightmare, a basement full of scurrying rats and dead cats and dogs. For fifteen years, people had been living over this stench, and the CHA had only now discovered it." Chap. 25, p. 241.

"I worry about dying, dying at a young age, while you're little. I'll be thinking about I want to get out of the jects. I want to get out. It ain't no joke when you die." Chap. 27, p. 164.

"As LaJoe walked toward the back to break up the fight, she smiled. At least, she thought, I still have both of them. At least they're still mine." Chap. 31, p. 198.



Topics for Discussion

Discuss prejudice. In what ways are Lafayette and Pharoah affected by prejudice in the community? What contributes to the attitudes of individuals, groups, or organizations that have discriminatory beliefs?

Discuss how the brothers have changed over the two year period. What have they learned and how have they grown? How does their outlook on life change? What significant events have had an impact on these changes?

Explain how the history of Horner Homes impacts the residents at the time the book was written. What has changed and what has remained the same? What changes will probably occur in the future? What will remain the same in the future?

Compare and contrast the older and younger set of siblings. What is similar between the two? What is different? Why have the older siblings disappointed their mother? What prospects and opportunities do the younger siblings have to avoid the same path?

Compare and contrast Lafayette and Pharoah. What are the differences between the two? What is the same? How does the way the brothers interpret and cope with their challenges differ?

Discuss the language used throughout the novel. What is different about the language in this book from other chronicles or biographies? Is the language too dry to be entertaining? Why do you think the author has chosen this approach? How would the book differ if it were written in a purely journalistic fashion?

Discuss the point of view. Why does the writer occasionally use other characters besides Lafayette and Pharoah as the point of view character? Does this technique distract the reader? How would it be different if it had been written through one of the brothers in the first person point of view?