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About the author:

Michael L. Printz Award winner and Margaret A. Edwards Award recipient Walter Dean Myers has garnered critical acclaim for his fiction, nonfiction, and poetry for young people. He is one of today's preeminent children's writers. Walter



Dean Myers grew up in Harlem and now lives in Jersey City, NJ, with his family.

Praise for Walter Dean Myers:

Monster

"A novel that in both form and subject guarantees a wide teen audience."

— The Horn Book (starred review)

"A riveting courtroom drama that will leave a powerful, haunting impression on young minds."

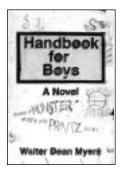
—Publishers Weekly (starred review)

Bad Boy

"Myers paints a fascinating picture of his childhood growing up in Harlem in the 1940s." —*Publishers Weekly*

"Many of the individual scenes have power...and the author's voice and heart are consistently heard and felt throughout."

— The Horn Book



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Monster/Bad Boy/ Handbook for Boys by Walter Dean Myers

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About this guide:

Walter Dean Myers's Monster, Bad Boy, and Handbook for Boys are all novels about young black males growing up in Harlem. However, each character faces his own challenges, has his own outlook, and has different life experiences. Steve, in Monster, doesn't want to accept responsibility for his decisions and ends up on trial for murder. Bad Boy, a memoir, was written by Walter Dean Myers because his life might have been very similar to Steve's yet turned out quite different. Handbook for Boys was written to provide guidance and "life lessons" Walter Dean Myers wished he had had growing up. The discussion topics are intended to spark conversations and ideas about the issues raised in these books.

About these books:

Monster

He's young. He's black. And sixteen-year-old Steve Harmon is on trial for murder. A Harlem drugstore owner has been shot and killed during a robbery, and word is that Steve served as the lookout. Guilty or innocent, Steve has become a pawn in the system. He's been called a monster, and worse. As a way of coping with the horrific events that entangle him, Steve, an amateur filmmaker, decides to transcribe his trial into a movie script. But despite his efforts, reality is blurred until he can no longer tell who he is or what is the truth. Winner of or short-listed for four major awards, *Monster* is Walter Dean Myers at his riveting best.

Bad Boy

Who would ever have thought that celebrated author Walter Dean Myers was once a troublemaker and a truant? Walter recounts what growing up in Harlem was like in the 1940s and '50s-when seeing Langston Hughes and Sugar Ray Robinson on the street was the norm and Jackie Robinson ruled the baseball field. Just how bad was he? From instigating mischievous pranks at home to fighting in the classroom—especially when teased about his speech impediment—irrepressible Walter was a handful. Still, he had a tremendous love for books, and by high school he longed to become a writer. But financial troubles at home made him feel his options were so limited that Walter dropped out of high school. Where was the direction and motivation he needed to pursue his dreams? Readers of all ages will identify with Walter's struggle to find his own way and become a successful writer.

Handbook for Boys

Jimmy and Kevin could really use a guide to life. Jimmy's fighting and Kevin's drug problem almost land them in a juvenile detention facility until Duke offers them afterschool jobs at his Harlem barbershop. According to Duke, there are rules for everything: how to stay out of trouble, how to succeed in life, what it takes to make it. But is it good advice or just more aggravation?

In the groundbreaking tradition of the award-winning *Monster* and *Bad Boy*, Walter Dean Myers fashions a complex, layered novel about the rules for success. *Handbook for Boys* is the book that Myers wishes he could have read while growing up. It is the book young people need to read today.

For discussion:

Monster

- 1. In the opening credits to his movie, Steve writes that this is "the incredible story of how one guy's life was turned around by a few events." When does Steve lose control of his own fate? What could he have done differently to avoid the situation he finds himself in?
- 2. After a visit from his mother, Steve says, "I knew she felt that I didn't do anything wrong. It was me who wasn't sure. It was me who lay on the cot wondering if I was fooling myself." Why does Steve begin to doubt himself?
- 3. Which witnesses were sympathetic to Steve? Who is credible—the witnesses or Steve?
- 4. Petrocelli, the prosecuting attorney, maintains that "they are all equally guilty. The one who grabbed the cigarettes, the one who wrestled for the gun, the one who checked the place to see if the coast was clear." Is everyone equally guilty, or are there varying degrees of guilt? What are the degrees? Is Steve innocent or guilty?
- 5. How does the screenplay format enhance the story? What do you think the author wanted to accomplish by writing the novel as a screenplay? How does the art in this book enhance the story? As Steve's movie begins, the credits look like those in *Star Wars*. What does this say about Steve?

Bad Boy

- 1. Discuss Walter Dean Myers's relationship with his parents. How and why did his relationship with them change as he got older? Why was his mother more encouraging of Walter's writing than his father was?
- 2. Discuss Walter's love of books and writing. Why did he read so much as a child? How did he start writing? How did his passion for books help him?
- 3. Why do you think Walter took the risks he did? Why did he lose touch with other people his age? Why do you think he joined the army? Do you think this was a good decision?
- 4. Walter grew up with a number of people who affected his life. Discuss some of these people. What teachers were really concerned for him? How can you tell? There were also people considered bad influences in his life. Discuss them. Why was Walter drawn to Frank? Why do you think Walter considered himself a "bad boy"?
- 5. How might Walter's life have been different if he had been influenced by a character like Duke from *Handbook for Boys*? How might it have been different if the people in his life had been interested in his success?

Handbook for Boys

- 1. In the first chapter of *Handbook for Boys*, Jimmy says, "I got my plans worked out what I'm going to do with my life." Does his plan change by the end of the novel? Why?
- 2. Discuss Jimmy's relationship with his mother. How does Jimmy feel about her? How do you think she would like to see Jimmy change? Why do you think she does not take a more active role in guiding Jimmy?
- 3. Why do you think Jimmy is so concerned about his classmate, Bobby Brown? What does Jimmy learn from Duke about assessing Bobby's situation? Discuss ways in which Bobby Brown's life does or does not parallel Jimmy's life.
- 4. What kind of person do you think Jimmy will be in ten years? What about Kevin? Do you think Duke will leave a lasting impression on the boys?
- 5. What lessons in the book could also apply to young people of different races or gender?

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