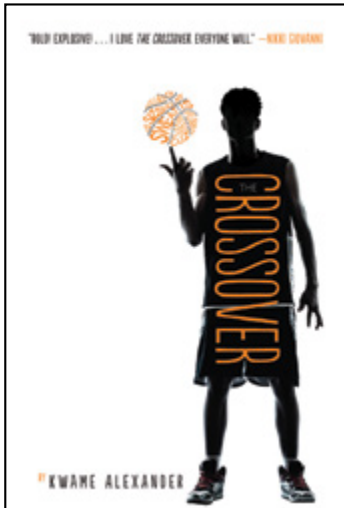


# The Crossover

BY KWAME ALEXANDER



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In this middle grade novel in verse that's *Love That Dog* meets *The Watsons Go to Birmingham* meets *Slam*, twelve-year-old twin basketball stars Josh and Jordan wrestle with highs and lows on and off the court as their father ignores his declining health.

1. As students read or listen to this verse novel, encourage them to visualize each of the main characters and talk about what they look like and how they talk and act. Work together to draw character sketches or find magazine or web-based images that look like these characters:

- Jordan (JB) Bell
- Josh ("Filthy McNasty") Bell
- Dad: Chuck Bell ("Da Man"), a former professional basketball player
- Mom: Dr. Crystal Stanley-Bell, the assistant principal at the boys' school (Reggie Lewis Junior High)

Talk about how the twins are alike and how they are different. For example, Jordan (JB) and Josh ("Filthy McNasty") are identical twins, but JB shaves his head bald and plays shooting guard and Josh has shoulder length dreadlocks (at first) and plays forward. It is usually Josh's point of view we see as the story unfolds.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.3; RL.4.6; RL.4.7; RL.5.3; RL.5.6; RL.5.7; RL.6.6; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.5; SL.5.5; SL.6.5]

2. This novel in verse is divided into six sections. Pause at the end of each section to talk about the main characters and what students are learning about Jordan (JB) and Josh (Filthy McNasty) in each section. Then consider the parallels with sports and the segments of a basketball game.

Sections:

*Warm Up*

*First Quarter*

*Second Quarter*

*Third Quarter*

*Fourth Quarter*

*Overtime*

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.1d; SL.5.1d; SL.6.1d; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.3]

3. Nicknames are an important part of this story and help us understand and relate to the characters. Read aloud the poems "How I Got My Nickname" (pp. 4-5) and "At First" (pp. 6-7) and talk about the significance of the nicknames in the story. Invite students to talk about the nicknames they have (or want) and how and why a person gets a nickname. When is it positive and fun and when is it embarrassing or uncomfortable?

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.1; RL.5.1; RL.6.1; SL.4.1d; SL.5.1d; SL.6.1d]

4. Set the stage by researching YouTube videos featuring some of the sports figures mentioned in the novel such as: Kevin Durant, LeBron James, Chris Paul, Magic Johnson, Michael Jordan. Read aloud the poems "Josh Bell" (pp. 2-3), "Jordan Bell" (pp. 9-10) or "Final Jeopardy" (pp. 155-156) that mention these basketball heroes. Invite the basketball coach or physical education teacher to collaborate with you in describing or demonstrating the game of basketball.

5. Several of the poems in this novel lend themselves to readers theater performance, so that students can get a sense of the characters' voices. The following poems offer text in two parts: plain text and italicized text for two volunteers or two groups to read aloud in turn.

- "Conversation" pp.15-17
- "The game is tied" p. 34

- “Mom doesn’t like us eating out” pp. 39-40
- “The inside of Mom and Dad’s bedroom closet” pp. 42-45
- “Dad Takes Us to Krispy Kreme and Tells Us His Favorite Story (Again)” pp. 61-63
- “Mom calls me into the kitchen” pp. 94-96
- “Phone Conversation (I Sub for JB)” pp. 104-107
- “Suspension” pp. 136-139
- “I run into Dad’s room” pp. 163-165
- “School’s Out” pp. 186-187
- “Santa Claus Stops By” pp. 205-207
- “Questions” pp. 208-209

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.1b; SL.5.1b; SL.6.1b]

6. Several of Kwame Alexander’s poems in this novel employ rhyme and rap. Invite volunteers to choose one of their favorites to practice and perform for the class.

- “Filthy McNasty” p. 8
- “The Show” pp. 28-29
- “Ode to My Hair” p. 31
- “Man to Man” p. 57
- “The Last Shot” pp. 219-220

Finally, look online for examples of music from the novel, such as the song “Filthy McNasty” by Horace Silver, the jazz musician referenced in “How I Got My Nickname” (pp. 4-5). Play it in the background as you read the poem aloud.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.5; SL.5.5; SL.6.5]

7. The author also introduces crucial vocabulary terms through twelve key poems presented at critical intervals throughout the book.

- “cross-o-ver” p. 27
- “ca-lam-i-ty” p. 37-38
- “pa-tel-la ten-di-ni-tis” pp. 46-47
- “pul-chri-tu-di-nous” p. 53
- “hy-per-ten-sion” p. 74
- “i-ron-ic” p. 102
- “tip-ping point” pp. 116-117
- “chur-lish” pp. 140-141
- “pro-fuse-ly” p. 152

- “es-tranged” p. 185
- “my-o-car-di-al in-farc-tion” p. 199-200
- “star-less” p. 227

Talk with students about how the poet uses the usual dictionary format in presenting the vocabulary term: the word is shown in syllables, with a pronunciation guide, the part of speech is indicated, and the poem provides a kind of definition along with examples of the meaning of the word (using the phrase “as in:”). Working together, look up some of these words in a dictionary (or online) and compare your findings with the vocabulary poem. Challenge students to write their own “vocabulary” poems for a new word they encounter in the book using Alexander’s “formula.”

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.1; RL.4.4; RL.5.1; RL.5.4; RL.6.1; RL.6.4; SL.4.1d; SL.5.1d; SL.6.1d]

8. The poet also incorporates ten poems about “rules” that offer connections between basketball and life throughout the novel. Invite students to discuss these “rules” poems and how they fit in the overall story. Collaborate with students to use Glogster.com to create a quick glog, a digital interactive poster that pulls together images related to key words from the poem in a new, visual representation of the poem’s “rules.”

- “Basketball Rule #1” (p. 18)
- “Basketball Rule #2” (p. 49)
- “Basketball Rule #3” (p. 64)
- “Basketball Rule #4” (p. 69)
- “Basketball Rule #5” (p. 91)
- “Basketball Rule #6” (p. 127)
- “Basketball Rule #7” (p. 144)
- “Basketball Rule #8” (p. 189)
- “Basketball Rule #9” (p. 212)
- “Basketball Rule #10” (p. 228)

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.1; RL.5.1; RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.1d; SL.4.5; SL.5.5; SL.6.5]

9. As you read this book with students, they may notice that the poet presents a variety of types of poems in the book (or you can point this out after reading). Talk about

how poets use “poetic license” to use or adapt various forms and types of poems, even making up their own (like a text message poem). Discuss these various types and how each one is composed and arranged. Challenge students to select their favorite type and work with a partner to create their own original poem examples.

**Found Poems**

“Article #1 in the *Daily News* (December 14)” p. 153

“Article #2 in the *Daily News* (January 14)” p. 223-224

**Apology Poem**

“Dear Jordan” p. 157

**List Poems**

“Things I Learn at Dinner” p. 170

“Mom, since you asked, I’ll tell you why I’m so angry” p. 202

**Text Poems**

“Text Messages from Mom, Part One” pp. 177-178

“Text Messages from Vondie” p. 203

“Text Messages from Mom, Part Two” p. 216

**Two Word Poems**

“At Noon, in the Gym, with Dad” pp. 192-194

**Tanka**

“Tanka for Language Arts Class” p. 210

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.1; RL.4.5; RL.5.1; RL.5.5; RL.6.1; RL.6.5]

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.1; RL.4.2; RL.4.4; RL.5.1; RL.5.2; RL.5.4; RL.6.1; RL.6.2; RL.6.4; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.1d; SL.5.1d; SL.6.1d]

Guide by Sylvia Vardell

10. The title of this book (*The Crossover*) is an important phrase and idea throughout the book. It refers to a basketball move (described in the first “vocabulary” poem) as well as to (spoiler alert) the death of the boys’ father. Tell students to watch for the use of the phrase and talk about how it can be understood in each of the poems. Some examples:

- “Josh’s Play-by-Play” p. 25
- “cross-o-ver” p. 27
- “When we get to the court” pp. 190-191
- “Text Messages from Mom, Part Two” p. 216
- “Article #2 in the *Daily News* (January 14)” pp. 223-224
- “Where Do We Go from Here?” pp. 225-226
- “Free Throws” pp. 232-235

Discuss: When does the idea of the “crossover” move from being a basketball term to becoming the theme of the book? How can you tell?