



Bad Boy

by Walter Dean Myers

Teacher's Guide

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Synopsis

Roots

Myers traces his heritage back to his great-great uncle Lucas Dennis, a slave in Virginia before the Civil War. Myers himself was born in 1937. He has no memory of his mother, Mary Dolly Green, because she died when Myers was still a small child. He considers his father's first wife, Florence Dean, to be his mother. She was white; his father, black. Herbert and Florence married and settled in Harlem. Myers ends up living in Harlem with Florence's first husband, George Myers. Thus, he is not related to either of his parents through birth.

Harlem

Florence is an immaculate house-keeper, although she is also raising two daughters and working outside the house. Vivid detail makes the Harlem of the '40s come alive, from the music and children's games to the everyday struggle for survival. A mischievous and spoiled child, Myers is especially close to his mother. She teaches him to read, sharing *True Romance* magazines. Although books saved him and helped him become a famous writer, they moved him away from the adoptive parents he loved. He still feels ashamed about how he hurt his mother: "Later when I had learned to use words better, I lost my ability to speak so freely with Mama," he says.

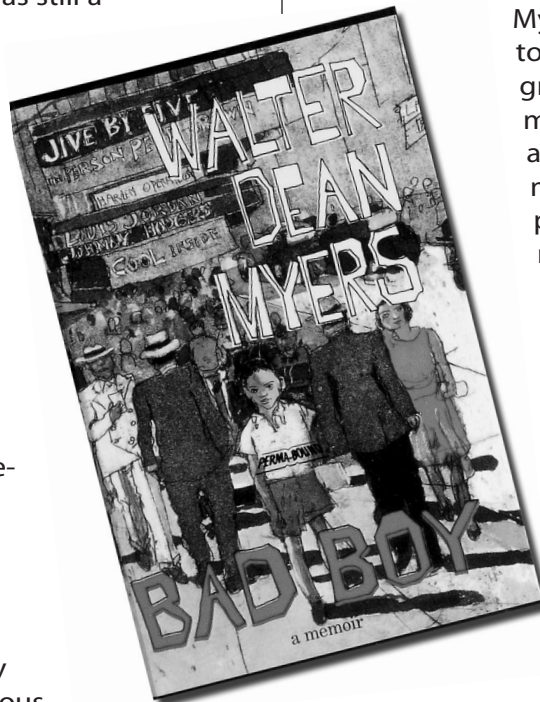
Let's Hear It for the First Grade!

Because he is so bright, Myers is skipped directly into second grade, over the objections of the first-grade teacher Mrs. Dworkin. Unfortunately, Myers

suffers from a severe speech impediment, which makes him very difficult to understand. It also contributes to his combative nature. With the advent of World War II, eight-year-old Myers becomes a latch-key child. Myers earns poor grades in conduct, and his parents beat him for what they perceive as his lack of effort.

Arithmetic Summer

Myers' sister Viola marries a soldier, Frank Law, who drills the child in math. As a result, Myers develops a life-long aversion to math. By this time, it is fourth grade, and Myers is getting into more and more fights. He has his appendix removed. Disregarding medical advice, he sneaks out to play and the incision opens. He rarely attends school that year as a result, but is promoted to fifth grade nonetheless.



Bad Boy

It is 1947. Myers is beginning to be aware of race. His birth father and his Uncle Lee re-enter his life. His father comes for a visit, and Uncle Lee is released from jail. Myers and his friends decide to hang Richard, a classmate, when they read about a lynching. Reverend Abbott

comes along and saves Richard's life. The boys are punished severely. Myers makes the point that beatings are common but not considered abuse, as they are today. Myers gets very interested in baseball. He is still getting into many fights and his speech is still close to unintelligible. Even while performing poorly in school, Myers endlessly devours books, often in secret. He also writes, and is thrilled when one of his poems is published in the school magazine.

Mr. Irwin Lasher

Myers travels all over Harlem with his mother, to his great delight. He continues to read voraciously,

Bad Boy Walter Dean Myers

checking out books from the library and carrying them home, hidden in brown paper bags to avoid being teased by the other boys. This shows readers how Myers' intellectual gifts separate him from his peers, causing him to stir up trouble in order to belong. Although not yet in the sixth grade, Myers gets a job to help his financially-strapped family. He has his first male teacher, Mr. Lasher. The child is shocked when the teacher follows him home in an attempt to find out why he won't stop fighting. Mr. Lasher does two important things: he puts Myers in full-day speech once a week and convinces Myers that he is intellectually gifted. Myers continues to get into mischief, being injured when riding on a car bumper and later, jumping off a roof.

I Am Not the Center of the Universe

Not yet twelve years old, Myers is nearly six feet tall and very strong and aggressive. He graduates at the top of his class. Uncle Lee is killed in a bar fight, sending Myers' father into a year-long depression. Myers spends more and more of his time alone in his room, reading and writing.

A Writer Observes

He aspires to be a writer, but growing up in a poor family in Harlem, his hope for a successful future diminishes as he comes to realize the class and racial struggles that surrounded him.

Sonnets from the Portuguese

Myers has two personalities: the street-smart kid who plays sports and the intellectual and bookish young man who aspires to a career in literature. He is especially taken with the poetry of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and wants to write as she does. His advanced class of very bright kids behaves badly, and Myers gets even more of a reputation as a troublemaker.

Heady Days at Stuyvesant High

Although Myers is admitted into one of the most competitive high schools in New York City, Stuyvesant High, he feels at a great disadvantage because his family is poor and sinking further down. His blind grandfather comes to live with them, further straining the budget. His parents are fighting more, too. Myers' speech is still bad, but he is writing more and more. He encounters more racial incidents and wonders how he will fit into a society that does not like him.

The Garment Center

At fifteen, Myers is lost. He begins to doubt himself and the values that he had always relied on, attending high school less and less, turning to the streets and his books for comfort. He gets a job in the garment center. He becomes aware of racism in colleges; many colleges refuse to admit blacks and have quotas for Jews. His mother is gambling and drinking more and more.

God and Dylan Thomas

Myers cuts school for three weeks. He is depressed and gets into more fights. He feels like he is an outsider looking in on his own life. He tries to meet Dylan Thomas, but the famous poet had already been carried out of the bar, drunk.

Marks on Paper

School is becoming a disaster. Myers likes only his creative writing class and lets everything else drop. He takes up with a homeless man named Frank Hall. Myers is classified as mentally disturbed.

The Stranger

Sinking even lower, Myers thinks of suicide. He finds out that Frank is a murderer. Together, they make deliveries for drug dealers. Myers is sent to Bellevue for psychological testing.

Dr. Holiday

Myers is treated by Dr. Holiday, an attractive black, female therapist. Although she means well, she is unable to help him. He is baffled when she asks him if he likes being black: he had never before considered the question.

Being Black

Sadness and bewilderment infuse these last chapters as Myers faces a bleak future. Intellectually, he's left his family and friends far behind, but his race and circumstances seem to give him few choices.

1954

It is senior year of high school and Myers barely attends. When he finally decides to show up, the school year has already ended—without his being aware of it.

Sweet Sixteen

When he is badly beaten in a drug delivery gone astray, Frank leaves town. After dropping out of high school, Myers enlists in the army.

The Typist

After completing his service in the Vietnam War, Myers returns home. He spends years at menial jobs, finally remembering a teacher’s advice—“Whatever you do, don’t stop writing”— and turns his full attention to his true interest. In time, his persistence pays off.

Books I’ve Typed

Myers lists his books and honors in this chapter.

Timeline of Harlem Events

- Feb. 17, 1919** 369th Regiment marches up Fifth Avenue to Harlem
- February** First Pan African Congress organized by W.E.B. Du Bois in Paris
- June to Sept.** Race riots in Washington, D.C., Chicago, Charleston, Knoxville, Omaha, and elsewhere
- September** Race Relations Commission founded
- 1920** August Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) Convention held at Madison Square Garden
James Weldon Johnson, first black officer (secretary) of NAACP appointed.
- May 22, 1921** *Shuffle Along* by Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake opens. It is the first musical revue written and performed by African Americans. Cast members include Josephine Baker and Florence Mills.
- September** Marcus Garvey founds African Orthodox Church
Second Pan African Congress held
Colored Players Guild of New York founded
- 1922** First Anti-Lynching legislation approved by House of Representatives
- Fall** The Cotton Club opens
Marcus Garvey arrested for mail fraud and sentenced to five years in prison.
Third Pan African Congress

- Mar. 21, 1924** Civic Club Dinner, sponsored by Opportunity, bringing black writers and white publishers together. This event is considered the formal launching of the New Negro movement.
- Oct. 1925** American Negro Labor Congress held in Chicago
- May 1927** *In Abraham’s Bosom* by Paul Green, with an all-black cast, wins the Pulitzer Prize for Drama
Marcus Garvey deported.
Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington begin their careers.
Harlem Globetrotters established.
- Feb. 1929** Negro Experimental Theatre founded
- October 29** Black Thursday Stock Exchange crash.
- 1933** Cicely Tyson born
- 1937** Zora Neale Hurston publishes *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Author Sketch

Walter Milton Myers was born in 1937, in Martinsburg, WV. His family was very poor. When he was three years old, Myers was adopted by Herbert and Florence Dean, who settled in New York City’s Harlem district. Myers had a speech impediment, making it difficult for him to communicate, and at the suggestion of a teacher he began writing down his thoughts in the form of poems and short stories. Although he won awards for his work, he never dreamed of becoming a writer. “I was from a family of laborers,” Myers remembered, “and the idea of writing stories or essays was far removed from their experience. Writing had no practical value for a black child.”



Discouraged by what he perceived as the lack of opportunities for black children, Myers began cutting school. After serving in the Army for three years, Myers worked in a variety of positions, including mail clerk at the post office, interoffice

messenger, and interviewer in a factory. He didn't enjoy any of these jobs, and began gravitating toward writing as a career. "When I entered a contest for picture book writers," he claimed, "it was more because I wanted to write anything than because I wanted to write a picture book."

Myers won the contest, sponsored by the *Council on Interracial Books for Children*, for his text of *Where Does the Day Go?* Inspired by this success, Myers turned his attention to producing more picture books. In 1970, he took a staff position with Bobbs-Merrill, a publishing company, a job he held for seven years. After being laid off, Myers had already established a reputation as an able author of fiction geared for African American children and was able to support himself by his writing alone.

In *Interracial Books for Children Bulletin*, Myers described his priorities as an author. He tries, he said, to provide good literature for black children, "literature that includes them and the way they live" and that "celebrates their life and their person. It upholds and gives special place to their humanity." He lives in Jersey City, New Jersey.

Critic's Corner

Walter Dean Myers is ranked as one of the top writers of young adult fiction. Not surprisingly, his books have won dozens of awards, including the prestigious Coretta Scott King Award for multiple books. As Carmen Subryan noted in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, "Whether he is writing about the ghettos of New York, the remote countries of Africa, or social institutions, Myers captures the essence of the developing experiences of youth." *Bad Boy* received rave reviews. Miranda Doyle, reviewing the memoir for *Publishers Weekly*, said, "Young writers will find inspiration here, while others may read the book as a straightforward account of a colorful, unforgettable childhood." *Booklist* noted: "Many teens will see themselves in Myers' account of his troubled coming-of-age, especially since he offers no pat solutions. He doesn't analyze or laugh at his youth from an adult perspective, and he doesn't overdramatize his childhood self." *Voice of Youth Advocates* called the memoir "A powerful read. Will make the reader laugh out loud & sigh with satisfaction." *School Library Journal* said, "[A] superb memoir. Young writers will find inspiration

here." *The Chicago Tribune* called the memoir "A thoughtful, cautionary and inspiring tale."

Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books said: "This memoir joins the ranks of stellar literary autobiographies, such as Fleischman's *Abracadabra Kid* and Zindel's *Pigman and Me*."

Myers' Other Works

Young Adult Fiction

Fast Sam, Cool Clyde, and Stuff, 1975
Brainstorm, 1977
Mojo and the Russians, 1977
Victory for Jamie, 1977
It Ain't All for Nothin', 1978
The Young Landlords, 1979
The Black Pearl and the Ghost; or, One Mystery after Another, 1980
The Golden Serpent, 1980
Hoops, 1981
The Legend of Tarik, 1981
Won't Know till I Get There, 1982
The Nicholas Factor, 1983
Tales of a Dead King, 1983
Mr. Monkey and the Gotcha Bird, 1984
Motown and Didi: A Love Story, 1984
The Outside Shot, 1984
Adventure in Granada, 1985
The Hidden Shrine, 1985
Duel in the Desert, 1986
Ambush in the Amazon, 1986.
Sweet Illusions, 1987
Crystal, 1987, reprinted, 2002
Shadow of the Red Moon, 1987
Fallen Angels, 1988
Scorpions, 1988
Me, Mop, and the Moondance Kid, 1988
The Mouse Rap, 1990.
Somewhere in the Darkness, 1992
The Righteous Revenge of Artemis Bonner, 1992
Mop, Moondance, and the Nagasaki Knights, 1992.
Darnell Rock Reporting, 1994.
The Glory Field, 1994
Slam!, 1996
Smiffy Blue: Ace Crime Detective: The Case of the Missing Ruby and Other Stories, 1996.
The Journal of Joshua Loper: A Black Cowboy, 1999
The Journal of Scott Pendleton Collins: A World War II Soldier, 1999.
Monster, 1999
The Journal of Bidley Owens, the Negro Leagues, 2001.
Patrol, 2001

Handbook for Boys: A Novel, 2002
Three Swords for Granada, 2002.
The Dream Bearer, 2003
The Beast, 2003
Shooter, 2004
I've Seen the Promised Land, 2004
USS Constitution, 2004
Autobiography of My Dead Brother, 2005
Street Love, 2006

Selected Nonfiction

Now Is Your Time! The African-American Struggle for Freedom (1992)
Malcolm X: By Any Means Necessary (1993)
Toussaint L'Ouverture: The Fight for Haiti's Freedom (1996)
Amistad: A Long Road to Freedom (1998)
At Her Majesty's Request: An African Princess in Victorian England (1999)
The Greatest: Muhammad Ali (2001)
Bad Boy: A Memoir (2001)
Harlem Hellfighters (2006)

Selected Other Works

Brown Angels: An Album of Pictures and Verse (1993)
Harlem: A Poem (1997)
Patrol: An American Soldier in Vietnam (poems) (2002)
Here in Harlem: Poems in Many Voices (2004)
Jazz (poems) (2006)

Bibliography

African-American Review, spring, 1998, R. D. Lane, "Keepin' It Real': Walter Dean Myers and the Promise of African-American Children's Literature," p. 125.
Children's Literature Review, Volume 4, Gale (Detroit, MI), 1982.
Contemporary Black Biography, Volume 8, Gale (Detroit, MI), 1994.
Contemporary Literary Criticism, Volume 35, Gale (Detroit, MI), 1985.
Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 33: Afro-American Fiction Writers after 1955, Gale (Detroit, MI), 1984.
 Myers, Walter Dean, *Bad Boy: A Memoir*, HarperCollins (New York, NY), 2001.
 Patrick-Wexler, *Walter Dean Myers*, Raintree Steck-Vaughan (Austin, TX), 1996.
 Rush, Theresa G., editor, *Black American Writers: Past and Present*, Scarecrow Press (Metuchen, NJ), 1975.
St. James Guide to Young Adult Writers, 2nd edition, St. James Press (Detroit, MI), 1999.
Something about the Author Autobiography Series, Volume 2, Gale (Detroit, MI), 1986.

General Objectives

1. To understand life in Harlem in the 1940s
2. To understand the book's title
3. To recognize the importance of setting
4. To assess Myers' personality
5. To recognize the book's theme and lessons that it teaches
6. To appreciate how people cope with adversity
7. To explore the ways kindness can be shown
8. To find examples of bravery and courage
9. To understand Myers' encounters with racism
10. To evaluate the author's point of view

Specific Objectives

1. To understand how Myers came to live with Florence and George Myers
2. To analyze Myers' severe speech impediment and its effects on his childhood
3. To probe why Myers gets into so many fights
4. To determine the effect of Myers' intelligence on his adjustment with his peers
5. To understand why Myers reads so voraciously
6. To trace Myers' breakdown in his late teens
7. To probe why Myers enlists in the Army
8. To appreciate the irony in Myers' description of his writing as "typing"
9. To understand the effect his father's illiteracy has on Myers
10. To analyze why Myers includes the list of his books and awards at the end of the memoir.

Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Walter Dean Myers' style, present the following terms and applications to the autobiography:

Characterization: the different ways an author tells readers about characters. Sometimes, writers tell about characters directly. Other times, writers let readers reach their own decisions by showing the comments, thoughts, and actions of the other characters. Myers uses direct characterization in most instances, as this excerpt from page 66 shows: "As I approached my twelfth birthday, I was nearly six feet tall and physically aggressive. I loved to run, to jump, to test my strength and speed against other boys. I didn't at all mind fighting, if necessary."

Bad Boy Walter Dean Myers

Conflict in Literature: a struggle or fight. Conflict makes a story interesting because readers want to find out the outcome. Myers has severe external conflicts, as shown by his continual fights in school. He also experiences major internal conflicts, culminating in his near nervous breakdown and treatment at Bellevue Hospital. "I hadn't yet sorted out the shame I felt for having squandered my life, which, at seventeen, I thought was nearly over anyway." (page 196).

Memoir: a first-person prose selection about an event. *Bad Boy* is a memoir about Walter Dean Myers' coming of age as a writer. The bulk of the memoir focuses on his childhood in the 1940s and 1950s in Harlem, New York. Myers telescopes his young adulthood and writing career in a few pages, to keep the focus on his childhood.

The Importance of Setting

The memoir could not have taken place anywhere but Harlem, New York, the historic cultural nexus of African-American life in America. Harlem shaped Myers' childhood and his outlook on life. In part, it helped make him into the writer he is today, which is why he devotes so much of the book to describing its atmosphere.

Today, Harlem has a reputation for urban decay and racial tension, but that is far from the truth: Harlem is once again an up-and-coming trendy neighborhood. The second Harlem Renaissance has been taking place for some time now as homesteaders refurbish elegant brownstones to their old glory. The area has become even more elegant since former-President Bill Clinton set up his office there.

Harlem is located north of 110 Street, south of 151 Street, and west of Fifth Avenue. Its many attractions include Grants Tomb, the Apollo Theatre, Columbia University, and the Studio Museum in Harlem. In part because of Columbia University, the area is also home to many trendy restaurants of astonishingly wide variety.

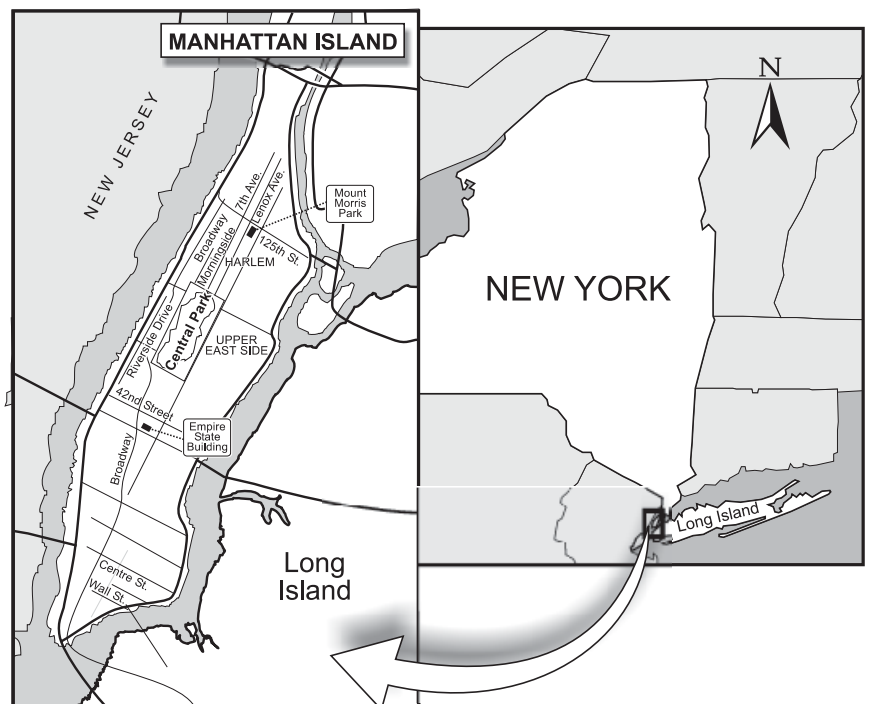
Cross-Curricular Sources

Fiction

William Armstrong, *Sounder*
Sharon Draper, *Tears of a Tiger* and *Forged by Fire*
Christopher Paul Curtis, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham* and *Bud, Not Buddy*
Sharon G. Flake, *The Skin I'm In*
Jack Ezra Keats, *The Snowy Day*
Robert Lipsyte, *The Contender*
Jeanette Winter, *Follow the Drinking Gourd*
Jacqueline Woodson, *Coming on Home Soon*

Nonfiction

Chrisanne Beckner, *100 African Americans Who Shaped History*
Louis Haber, *Black Pioneers of Science and Invention*
Barack Obama, *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*
Cal Massey, *Famous African American Women*
Diane Patrick, *The New York Public Library Amazing African American History: A Book of Answers for Kids*
Nancy I. Sanders, *A Kid's Guide to African American History*
Jeffrey Stewart, *1001 Things Kids Should Know About African American History*
Otha Richard Sullivan, *African American Inventors*



Audio Books

The Dream Bearer
Fallen Angels
Bad Boy
Shooter
Slam!

DVDs, Videos

African Americans (1993)
Harlem Renaissance: Fats Waller, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Nat King Cole (DVD)
A Legacy of Patriotism and Valor: African Americans in WW II (1998)
Lullaby of Harlem (DVD)
Story of a People: Black Youth (1998)

Internet

Biographical Information on Walter Dean Myers page
www.scils.rutgers.edu/~kvander/myers.html
 Scholastic Web site
<http://teacher.scholastic.com/>
 Walter Dean Myers Teacher Resource File
falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/myers.htm

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Walter Dean Myers' *Bad Boy* should include these aspects:

Themes

- courage
- despair
- family love
- fighting
- literary role models
- poverty
- racism
- reading
- speech impediments
- writing

Motifs

- being adopted by members of your extended family
- dealing with a severe speech impediment
- coping with increasing poverty and family disruption
- being recognized for your extraordinary intelligence
- wanting to become a writer
- remembering the influence of skilled and supportive teachers
- having a nervous breakdown

- dropping out of high school
- enlisting in the Army
- finding your voice and audience as a writer

Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have particular meaning in *Bad Boy*. Explain the meaning of each. Page numbers indicate the context from which the item is taken.

1. It was during this visit that he met George Myers, Florence's first husband, her two daughters, and George's children by Mary Myers. (p. 6)
(As a result of this visit, young Walter comes to live with his foster family. He is never formally adopted, but his new parents raise him to the best of their ability. His foster mother, in particular, is very loving and close to him.)
2. Reading a book was not so much like entering a different world—it was like discovering a different language. (p. 46)
(Because of his severe speech impediment, Myers has trouble expressing himself. Perhaps because of this, language becomes one of his central concerns. He often feels more authentic when reading than when playing with his friends and pursuing other daily activities.)
3. As much as I enjoyed reading, in the world in which I was living it had to be a secret vice. (p. 52)
(When he brings books home from the library, older kids on the street tease him about his reading. They make it clear that "normal" boys do not read. Since he does not want to get into fights about his reading, Myers starts bringing his books to and from the library in a brown paper bag.)
4. The idea that race played a large part in the life process was becoming clear to me. (p. 85)
(Since Harlem was largely black in the 1940s and 1950s, Myers did not often have to deal with issues of race. As he matures, however, Myers becomes aware that the movers and shakers in the city are white—not black.)
5. By this time there were two very distinct voices going on in my head, and I moved easily between them. (p. 92)
(One part of his personality has to do with sports and street life, the components of the black male personality. The other part of his personality has to do with literature. This part he carefully keeps secret from his friends and family.)

Bad Boy Walter Dean Myers

6. For the first time in my life I was faced with the notion that I would have to deal with the idea of race as a central part of my life. (p. 111-112)
(Myers is friends with Eric, a white boy. When Myers is not welcome at many of the parties that Eric attends because Myers is black, he becomes sharply aware of the effect of race on his life.)
7. I wanted to be in the system that I was walking away from, but I didn't know how to get in. (p. 132)
(Family, friends, and school officials mistakenly assume that Myers does not want to attend school. They do not understand that he wants nothing more than to be part of the power establishment, but has no idea how to join. He has no role models: although loving, his parents cannot help him. His father is illiterate; his mother, increasingly addicted to drink and gambling.)
8. "Whatever happens," she whispered, "don't stop writing." (p. 153)
(During a conference about his poor school attendance, Myers' English teacher encourages him to write. He clings to this shred of praise and it eventually motivates him to pursue a career as a writer.)
9. My answer to the question of race was to reject my identity as a black and take another identity. (p. 179)
(Myers decides that rather than identifying himself by race, he will identify himself by interests and inclination: he will be an intellectual. He tries to convince himself that race does not matter as long as you are intelligent. He finds that this is not the case at all.)
10. I hadn't yet sorted out the shame I felt for having squandered my life, which, at seventeen, I thought was nearly over anyway (p. 196)
(Today, Myers' condition would likely be diagnosed as a nervous breakdown or depression and he would be given anti-depressant medication. In the early 1950s, he is treated with talk therapy, which does not help him.)

Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the book.

Questions 1-5 (Literal Level)

1. When and where does the story take place?
(The memoir is set in Harlem, a section of New York City, largely

in the 1940s and 1950s.)

2. Who raises Myers?
(He is raised by his father's first wife, Florence Dean, and her second husband, Herbert.)
3. Why does Myers keep his reading secret?
(He wants to fit in with the kids in his neighborhood, who are not readers.)
4. What causes Myers to fight so much?
(He is frustrated by his speech impediment; he is bored in school because he is very bright and he is not challenged enough.)
5. Why doesn't Myers' father read his books?
(Herbert is illiterate.)

Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)

6. Why does Myers call himself a "bad boy"?
(He got in many fights, he dropped out of school, he squandered all the opportunities that he was offered.)
7. What role does reading play in Myers' life?
(Reading fills his life. It becomes his succor, his love, his identity. He reads to escape his everyday life. Soon, reading becomes more real and important to him than his routine.)
8. Why does Myers name many of his teachers and describe them in such detail?
(His teachers become his touchstones, his role models, replacements for parents who cannot guide his intellectual life. He is especially influenced by Irwin Lasher, the teacher who made sure that he got a great deal of help for his speech impediment and recognized his prodigious intellectual gifts.)

Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

9. In what way did joining the Army help Myers?
(It helped him mature and gave him some much-needed distance from his family problems. Had he stayed home, he might have begun delivering drugs for dealers like Frank Hall.)
10. Why do you think Myers spends so much time describing his childhood and then telescopes all the years leading to his career as a writer?
(Myers focuses on the forces that shaped him as a man: his childhood in Harlem, his family, his education, his combative nature, and his speech difficulties.)

Questions 11-12 (Creative Level)

11. Imagine that you are one of Myers' elementary school teachers. Write a brief report explaining his strengths and weaknesses.
12. Make a travel guide for a day trip to Harlem in the 1940s.

Across the Curriculum

Art/Music

1. Myers refers to the Works Progress Administration. Research this group and find out when and how they were created. Then make a display of some of the art work produced by WPA members.
2. Create a three-dimensional diorama of Harlem in the 1940s. Label each part of the display with an appropriate quote from *Bad Boy*.
3. Draw a portrait of Myers as a teenager. Your portrait can be realistic or impressionistic.
4. Make Walter Dean Myers' family tree.
5. Design a new cover for this book. Use color, shape, and graphics to capture the book's main themes.

Speech/Drama

1. Working with some classmates, debate whether or not exceptionally bright students should be skipped ahead in school.
2. In a roundtable discussion, explore the different reasons for Myers' rage and his constant fighting.
3. With a classmate, improvise a scene in which Myers tells Dr. Holiday about the issues that are causing his depression.
4. Demonstrate how to play basketball. Make a handout with the rules for your classmates.
5. Give a speech in which thank a teacher who has helped you find your way in the world.

Language Arts

1. Write a poem that shows the anguish that Myers experiences as he tries to deal with his family circumstances and find his identity.
2. Myers lists many works of literature that influenced him. Choose one, read it, and explain why Myers found it important in shaping his character and art.
3. Imagine that you are Florence, Myers' adoptive mother. In a journal entry, explain how you have tried to help him.
4. Myers explains that a turning point in his education came when he read a story by James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues." Read the story

and explain in an essay why it had such an impact on Myers' life.

5. Help teach someone to read.

History/Social Studies

1. Report on the Harlem Renaissance, the flowering of culture that had a significant impact on American literature in the early part of the twentieth century.
2. Make a timeline of the key events in the Harlem Renaissance.
3. Find out how someone today would apply for admission to Stuyvestant School in New York City.
4. On page 171, Myers notes that in the early 1950s, the newspapers were filled with stories of the Rosenbergs. Find out who the Rosenbergs were and why they were executed.
5. Discover who Joe Louis was and why he was important. Share your findings in a brief report.

Science and Math

1. Find out how a speech problem such as the one that Myers suffers from would be treated today. What diagnosis would he get? What treatment would he receive?
2. Make a chart comparing the population of Harlem in the 1940s to its population today.
3. Myers mentions that he was hospitalized for three weeks for scarlet fever. Report on this illness. Find out what causes it and how it is treated today.
4. Myers scores the highest grade the sergeant had ever seen on the Army test. Using a review book on the test, list its contents. Then explain why Myers would have done so well on the test.

Alternate Assessment

1. Explain ways in which parents can help their children grow up to be happy and well-adjusted.
2. Write a sonnet, like the ones that Myers studies on page 95.
3. Recommend a book to a friend. Choose a book that you enjoyed or one that had a significant impact on your life.

Vocabulary

Complete the following chart with a synonym and antonym for each of the following words from the memoir. Write as many words as you can in each column.

Vocabulary Word	Synonym	Antonym
1. devastated	_____	_____
2. strenuous	_____	_____
3. glint	_____	_____
4. scowl	_____	_____
5. devious	_____	_____
6. decrepit	_____	_____
7. notorious	_____	_____
8. glorious	_____	_____
9. vice	_____	_____
10. incoherent	_____	_____

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Identification (20 points)

Briefly describe each person, place, or thing and explain why it is important in the story.

1. basketball
2. reading and books
3. typing
4. Harlem
5. Bellevue Hospital

Part II: Matching (20 points)

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left.

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| A. Walter Dean Myers | F. Dr. Holiday |
| B. Florence | G. Herbert Dean |
| C. Irwin Lasher | H. George and Mickey |
| D. Viola | I. Harlem |
| E. Uncle Lee | J. Vietnam |

- ___ 1. The teacher who recognizes Myers' superior intelligence
- ___ 2. Where Myers grows up
- ___ 3. The man who raises Myers as his own son
- ___ 4. Where the Army sent Myers to fight a war
- ___ 5. The author of *Bad Boy*
- ___ 6. Myers' uncle who dies in a bar fight
- ___ 7. Myers' brothers
- ___ 8. The woman who raises Myers as her own son
- ___ 9. The woman who treats Myers' depression
- ___ 10. Myers' sister

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part III: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements T if they are true or F if they are false.

- ___ 1. Myers traces his heritage back to his great-great uncle Lucas Dennis, a slave in Virginia before the Civil War.
- ___ 2. Myers was born in 1987.
- ___ 3. His father died when he was just a baby.
- ___ 4. Because he was so bright, Myers was skipped directly into second grade.
- ___ 5. Myers suffered from a severe speech impediment, which made him very difficult to understand.
- ___ 6. Myers' parents never struck him, but many children in his neighborhood were punished this way and it was not considered abusive.
- ___ 7. The family is solidly middle-class, so Myers never has to worry about money.
- ___ 8. By the time he almost twelve years old, Myers was nearly six feet tall and very strong.
- ___ 9. Myers is in an advanced class, but the children behave very badly.
- ___ 10. Myers drops out of school and joins the Army.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

- 1. Argue that Myers should or should not have skipped a grade in school.
- 2. Explain why Myers got into so many fights.
- 3. Describe how Myers feels about his career as a writer and why.
- 4. Explain what reading means to Walter Dean Myers.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Quote Identification (20 points)

Explain the significance of each excerpt from the memoir.

1. However, today, when I think of "mother," I think of another woman, my father's first wife, Florence Dean.
2. I realized I liked books, and I liked reading.
3. I knew that blacks did not have the same chances as whites, and I did not want to do something that was commendable only as a Negro accomplishment.
4. I spent the summer with my time divided between playing basketball and reading.
5. "Whatever happens," she whispered, "don't stop writing."

Part II: Matching (20 points)

Match the following descriptions with names of speakers from the list below. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- | | |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| A. Walter Dean Myers | F. Dr. Holiday |
| B. Florence Dean | G. Herbert Dean |
| C. Frank Hill | H. Frank Law |
| D. Viola Law | I. Martinsburg, WV |
| E. Uncle Lee | J. Stuyvesant |

- ____ 1. Friend Walter rescued from a gang beating
- ____ 2. Where Myers was born
- ____ 3. The man who raises Myers as his own son
- ____ 4. Walter's high school
- ____ 5. 'bad boy' and 'typist'
- ____ 6. Myers' uncle who dies in a bar fight
- ____ 7. Myers' brothers-in-law
- ____ 8. Woman Myers blamed for injuries to his legs
- ____ 9. The woman who treats Myers' depression
- ____ 10. Myers' sister

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

Part III: Motivation (20 points)

Complete each statement below with a reason or explanation.

1. Myers does not remember his mother because _____
2. When he starts school, Myers is skipped directly into second grade because _____
3. Florence and Herbert beat Walter because _____
4. Myers hides the books he reads because _____
5. Although not yet in the sixth grade, Myers gets a job because _____
6. Mr. Lasher is an important influence in Myers' life because _____
7. Herbert sinks into a year-long depression because _____
8. Although Myers wants to be a writer, he does not think he can succeed because _____
9. When Myers is admitted into one of the most competitive high schools in New York City, Stuyvesant High, he feels at a great disadvantage because _____
10. Frank Hall leaves town because _____

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Speculate how Myers' life might have been different if he had grown up in a racially-mixed or middle-class neighborhood
2. Analyze what the title means and tell why it fits the main idea of the memoir.
3. Describe the memoir's setting and explain its importance to the story.
4. Explain what you learned about Myers from *Bad Boy*.

Answer Key

VOCABULARY

Vocabulary Word	Synonym	Antonym
1. devastated	shattered	elated
2. strenuous	difficult	easy
3. glint	sparkle, gleam	dull
4. scowl	frown, grimace	smile, grin
5. devious	sneaky	trustworthy
6. decrepit	broken-down	sturdy, robust
7. notorious	infamous, nefarious	famous, praiseworthy
8. glorious	festive, famous, splendid	horrible, atrocious
9. vice	wickedness, evilness	morality, integrity
10. incoherent	disoriented	logical

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Identification (20 points)

- Basketball is important to Myers because it is part of his identity. It helps him be accepted by the other children. Since he was six feet tall by the time he was twelve, other players wanted him on their team.
- Reading and books are Myers' obsession and his lifeline. Although books saved him and helped him become a famous writer, they moved him away from the adoptive parents he loved. His father is illiterate; his mother reads only tabloids.
- "Typing" is how Myers' mother refers to his career as a writer. She is very proud of his accomplishments, although his father sneers at writing as something that boys do, not men. Myers' father believes that physical labor defines a man's life.
- Harlem is the center of Myers' life when he was a child and teenager. He enjoys its rich culture and close family values.
- Bellevue Hospital is the place Myers is taken for evaluation and treatment as he sinks into depression in his teen years. Although he is given care, the hospital is not able to help him with his depression and he continues his downward spiral.

Part II: Matching (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. C | 6. E |
| 2. I | 7. H |
| 3. G | 8. B |
| 4. J | 9. F |
| 5. A | 10. D |

Part III. True/False (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. T | 6. F |
| 2. F | 7. F |
| 3. F | 8. T |
| 4. T | 9. T |
| 5. T | 10. T |

Part IV: Essay (40 Points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Quote Identification (20 points)

- Walter's birth mother dies when he is very young. He comes to live with his foster family, his father's first wife and her husband Herbert. Walter is never formally adopted, but his new parents raise him to the best of their ability. His foster mother, in particular, is very loving and close to him.
- Because of his severe speech impediment, Myers has trouble expressing himself. Perhaps because of this, language becomes one of his central concerns. He often feels more authentic when reading than when playing with his friends and pursuing other daily activities.
- Since Harlem was largely black in the 1940s and 1950s, Myers did not have to deal with issues of race. As he matures, however, Myers becomes aware that the movers and shakers in the city are white—not black.
- One part of his personality has to do with sports and street life, the components of the stereotypical black male personality. The other part of his personality had to do with literature. This part he carefully keeps secret from his friends and family.
- During a conference about his poor school attendance, Myers' English teacher encourages him to write. He clings to this shred of praise and it eventually motivates him to pursue a career as a writer.

Part II: Matching (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. C | 6. E |
| 2. I | 7. H |
| 3. G | 8. B |
| 4. J | 9. F |
| 5. A | 10. D |

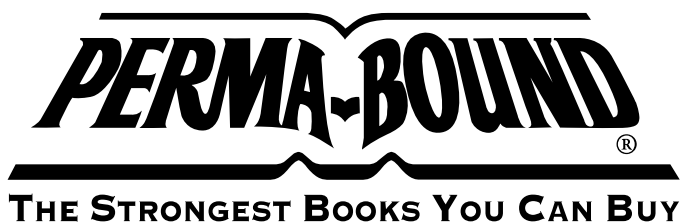
Part III: Motivation (20 points)

- she died when Myers was still a small child
- he is so intelligent

3. they think this is the way to get him to earn higher grades and to stop fighting in school
4. his friends, neighbors, and even parents think reading is a waste of time
5. his family needs the money
6. Lasher puts Myers in full-day speech once a week and convinces Myers that he is intellectually gifted
7. his brother Lee dies in a bar fight
8. he is poor and black
9. his family is poor and sinking further down
10. he is badly beaten in a drug delivery gone awry

Part IV: Essay (40 Points)

Answers will vary.



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