

SYNOPSIS

Seventeen-year-old Lonnie Jackson is on his own. His father has left because he says "his days were piling up on him." For a while Lonnie and his mother manage to make it, but he feels that her constant bickering has forced him to leave home and stay at the Grant Hotel where he has been working.

Though the Grant brings him refuge, basketball, a game he has perfected over the years, consoles him. Feeling guilty about stealing a case of scotch, Lonnie goes to the playground to comfort himself. There he tangles with a wino who is lying on the court, singing a silly song. When Lonnie attempts to remove him, the wino flashes a knife. Lonnie backs away and proceeds to play ball when the wino leaves.

The next day Lonnie goes to visit his childhood friends, Mary Ann and Paul. Though Paul has recently estranged himself from Lonnie and others who remind him of Harlem, Lonnie and Mary Ann have maintained their friendship and are becoming more serious about each other. When Lonnie arrives, Paul is not home, but Mary Ann is there arguing with her mother about her job at an after hours joint. Lonnie leaves Mary Ann and returns to the Grant to find out that his boss Jimmy Harrison has taken some of the stolen liquor in payment for money that he has loaned Lonnie's mother.

Lonnie heads to the gym where he is informed that a citywide basketball tournament is being held to allow ball players to compete for college scholarships. The Harlem team is formed with players Lonnie knows and respects, but when Calvin Jones, the wino from the playground, arrives and is introduced as the coach, Lonnie verbally attacks him and then refuses to play on the team. Cal then challenges Lonnie to a game of one-on-one and agrees not to coach the team if he loses. Cal wins, but Lonnie leaves, attributing his loss to his not taking the game seriously.

Lonnie doesn't go to practice, so Cal seeks him out at the Grant. Though their conversation becomes physical, Cal tells Lonnie that his game is good and that he shouldn't disappoint his teammates. To encourage him to attend the next practice, he tells Lonnie that his friend, a pro basketball player, will be there. As he leaves, Cal challenges Lonnie to "show up" if he's a man. Still angry, Lonnie cries himself to sleep.

Intentionally leaving his sneakers behind, Lonnie attends the next practice. Toward the end of the session, Sweet Man Johnson from the pros arrives, and it is evident that the team plays to impress him. Later Lonnie accompanies Cal and Sweet Man to a restaurant. Their conversation centers around their pro careers, and when the evening is over, Lonnie is impressed with Cal and decides to give him a chance as coach.

At the next practice Cal collects money for team uniforms which he promises for the first game. But on the day of the game, Cal does not show up. Without uniforms, the team plays and loses.

In the meantime, Mary Ann informs Lonnie that she has seen Paul's name on an envelope in her boss' office. Because Tyrone Giddins, her boss, has an infamous reputation and her brother Paul has been acting suspiciously, Mary Ann is concerned.

Cal finally shows up at the gym office with the uniforms. Lonnie's anger escalates and he attempts to shoot Cal but ends up shooting his own hand. After Cal attends to Lonnie's wound, Lonnie realizes how much Cal's absence has bothered him.

After Cal secures gym space from an ex-teammate, practice continues. On a day when practice is cancelled, Lonnie and Cal play another one-on-one. Cal's skills are superior, and Lonnie tries to compete. The game ends with Cal demonstrating the shot that made him famous.

Lonnie runs into Paul and his new friends Lenny and Joni who Lonnie feels are helping Paul to forget who he is and where he comes from. It is evident that the childhood chums have little in common. In fact, Lonnie and Paul feel uncomfortable in each other's presence. And Lonnie feels betrayed when Paul brings Lenny to the next practice. Lonnie tells himself that Lenny's inability to play basketball is the reason for his anger. He cannot face the fact that he has lost a dear friend and that he feels hurt and disappointed.

The Harlem team loses the first tournament game because of their poor performance in the first half. Though Cal doesn't coach the rest of the game, he returns to the locker room to congratulate them on winning the second half. Furthermore, he warns them about the parasitic scouts and advises them to always "choose" to win. Afterwards, Lonnie accompanies Cal to his apartment where Cal shares his scrapbook, containing his basketball memories. He also reveals that he has played for the NBA, but his career as "Spider" Jones is over because he was caught shaving points.

Lonnie's respect for Cal deepens. He introduces Mary Ann to him and shares with her what he has learned about Cal. He even admits that he plans to let Cal help him with his game. This is the first time that Lonnie has opened himself to another person.

Cal reciprocates by taking Lonnie to meet his ex-wife Aggie who is an ex-singer. She shares a song with Lonnie, and he promises to share some of his writing with her.

The next time Lonnie sees Mary Ann she has been assaulted by her brother Paul. In fact, she has found out that Paul has assaulted another woman. His unusual behavior prompts Lonnie and Mary Ann to break into Tyrone's office. They steal money and envelopes containing IOU's and welfare checks which have been cashed at a store in Highbridge. Lonnie goes to Highbridge and converses with Ugly, the man who runs the store. He learns that Paul has been stealing welfare checks from a particular apartment complex and brings them to Ugly for \$15 apiece.

When Lonnie questions Paul about their waning relationship,

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a fight ensues. Once calm is restored, Paul explains the changes in his life and why he is stealing welfare checks. Paul assumes that Tyrone is covering for him by burning the cashed checks, but Lonnie knows otherwise. Later he advises Mary Ann to keep quiet about what they have done.

The next day after practice, Cal reveals more about his relationship with Aggie, his NBA hearing with the commissioner, and the death of his three-year-old son. Alone with Mary Ann, Lonnie feels pressured when she wants to be with him. He runs away.

Cal and Lonnie meet with a man named O'Donnel who is on the public relations end of the basketball tournament. Claiming Cal's reputation as an issue, O'Donnel requests that Cal resign as coach. Cal questions O'Donnel concerning how he has obtained information on him. Reluctantly, O'Donnel gives him the name Rashid as his source. Leaving Cal alone to reflect, Lonnie heads to the gym and finds that the office has been ransacked. As they attempt to put things back in order, Lonnie explains what has transpired at O'Donnel's.

The team progresses in the tournament, but more action takes place off the court. Lonnie learns that Rashid is Tyrone's bodyguard Juno and that Cal has refused Tyrone's offer to finance the team. But Tyrone doesn't give up easily. He sends for Cal and demands that he fix the last game. After battering one of Tyrone's men, Cal is jailed.

While Cal is battling with Tyrone and his men, Lonnie is allowing himself to love Mary Ann.

Cal is released after Mary Ann steals his bail from Tyrone's office. Aggie takes him to her place and calls his father. Lonnie witnesses Cal confronting his father with abandoning him as a child. His final threat is to quit the team since the pressure has gotten to him.

Harlem plays two games without a coach. Cal seems to have disappeared. Two days after Cal's release, O'Donnel calls the gym looking for him. Lonnie and Aggie find Cal drunk in his apartment. Aggie begs him to go to see O'Donnel; he finally agrees. O'Donnel tells him that he can continue to coach, but he wants Lonnie out of the game to be played that evening against Manhattan. Cal figures that the sponsors want to promote a white player named Tomkins and that Lonnie would stop his game. Lonnie is allowed to dress for the game, but he cannot play.

Before the start of the championship game, Cal plays his own "game." He calls in a bet against Harlem and benches Lonnie. Paul comes in with Mary Ann who was injected with heroine by Tyrone after he found out that she had stolen his money. Mary Ann is rushed to the hospital, and the game begins.

Once Tyrone sees that Lonnie is out of the game, he bets heavily against Harlem. When Harlem is down three points with a few seconds left in the game, Lonnie is put into the game. Harlem wins by one point.

Immediately after the game, Tyrone and his men attack Cal in the locker room. Though Lonnie attempts to save Cal, Tyrone stabs and kills Cal. The police arrive too late.

Five days later, Cal is buried. Mary Ann is discharged from the hospital, and she and Lonnie go to Coney Island where he shares his future plans with her. Afterwards, they watch two boys playing basketball. Lonnie helps them raise a makeshift basket. Lonnie then tries to show them how to shoot, but he misses. Then one of the boys tells Lonnie that he knows nothing about basketball.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Walter Dean Myers is a contemporary black writer whose focus is on books for children and young adults. Born in Martinsburg, West Virginia, in 1937, Myers was raised in Harlem from the age of three. Harlem affected Myers' life, for this city was the scene of the Black Renaissance of the 1920's, and its historical and cultural significance fascinated him.

Though Myers began reading and writing at an early age, he was not encouraged to pursue writing as a profession because it was not considered a "legitimate" career. Myers, however, continued to read voraciously and write short stories and poems. His direction changed sharply when, at the age of 17, he joined the U.S. Army. After being discharged three years later, Myers worked as a mail clerk, a messenger, and an interviewer at a factory. Finding little fulfillment in these areas, he turned once again to writing.

In the late 1960's Myers entered and won a contest for picture book writers sponsored by the Council on Interracial Books for Children for the manuscript *Where Does The Day Go?* Encouraged by the publication of this winning piece, Myers created texts for other picture books, including *The Dragon Takes A Wife*, *The Dancers*, and *Fly, Jimmy, Fly!*

In 1975 Myers turned from picture books to novels for young adults with the publication of *Fast Sam, Cool Clyde, And Stuff*. This prolific writer's works include science fiction, fantasy, nonfiction, and mystery-adventure stories.

CRITIC'S CORNER

A number of Myers' novels are set in Harlem and focus on the experiences of black teens who confront the obstacles of inner city life. In all of his works he proposes to create "the essence of life." His subjects are serious, but his tone is optimistic. In *Shadow And Substance: Afro-American Experience In Contemporary Children's Fiction*, Rudine Sims notes that Myers emphasizes "the love and laughter that is part of the strengths and the inner resources that enable us to cope and to survive."

Myers is the recipient of numerous awards and honors which include the American Library Association Notable Book citation, Woodward Park School Annual Book Award, Coretta Scott King Award for fiction and nonfiction, and the Newbery Honor Book award.

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To discuss the importance of making ethical decisions and the consequences of making unethical ones
2. To define father, mother, family, and home
3. To analyze character development in the novel
4. To examine the "games" played in everyday life
5. To explain Myers' use of language
6. To examine the obstacles faced by inner city youth
7. To discuss the problems faced by adolescents
8. To determine how and why men and women react differently to emotional issues
9. To examine the positive effects of competition
10. To discuss the pros and cons of single parenting

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To analyze Cal's decision to "sell his game" and the effects of his actions on his life and on those around him
2. To discuss Lonnie's relationship with his mother
3. To examine the relationship between Lonnie and Cal

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4. To discuss Cal as a tragic hero
5. To define selected slang terms and phrases
6. To examine similes used by Myers
7. To analyze the basketball tournament as Lonnie's initiation into the adult world
8. To compare the relationship between Lonnie and Mary Ann and Cal and Aggie
9. To discuss the effects of the absent father in the lives of Lonnie and Cal
10. To identify the themes presented in the novel
11. To project the future of Lonnie, Aggie, Mary Ann, and Paul

MEANING STUDY

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have particular meaning in the novel. Explain each. Chapter and page numbers are given so that you can note the content from which the item is taken.

1. I cried myself to sleep for the first time since my father split. (Chapter 2, p. 24)
(After Cal leaves Lonnie's place in an attempt to coax him to play with the team, Lonnie throws and breaks an ashtray before he cries himself to sleep. The statement indicates the loneliness and hurt feelings he has been masking.)
2. "Looking around to see if I could find myself," (Chapter 2, p. 25)
(This is Cal's excuse for not showing up with the uniforms. Perhaps he is still feeling the depression caused by his aborted NBA career, but basketball is his life and he wants to be a part of it whether he plays or coaches.)
3. He was going to play against me, and right away I sensed that we were going through a manhood thing. (Chapter 3, p. 40)
(The second time Lonnie and Cal play a one-on-one match, Lonnie views the challenge as his initiation into manhood; on the other hand, Cal perceives the competition as a way of proving that he is "still" a man.)
4. We hit Lincoln Center with our bags and stuff and were looking around for Cal, and this white guy comes over and asks us were we the Alvin Ailey dancers. (Chapter 3, p. 37)
(Referring to the team as dancers is an insult, but the players are not aware of what is going on. Ox, one of the players, responds, "... but only now we ain't going to be dancing in no alleys anymore." [Alvin Ailey was an African American dancer and choreographer.]
5. Harlem (Chapter 3, p. 54)
(Black and Hispanic community in the northern part of Manhattan borough, New York City. Harlem was the site of the Harlem Renaissance, a cultural movement that featured black artists, writers, and musicians.)
6. On my way to the Grant, I felt every eye on the street on my back. It wasn't a good feeling. (Chapter 4, p. 83)
(Lonnie and Mary Ann have just stolen the envelopes and money from Tyrone's office. He's feeling guilty and a bit paranoid.)
7. "Don't you come crying when they lay this old gray head down beneath the ground, boy." (Chapter 5, p. 85)
(Lonnie's mother wants him to feel guilty about leaving her alone and not visiting her more often. Lonnie does not, however, feel guilt; he feels relief when he leaves.)
8. This guy was getting to be like a hole in the ground that you couldn't see the bottom of. (Chapter 5, p. 101)
(Lonnie is reacting to learning that Cal once had a son but lost him in a fire. The more he learns about Cal the more he realizes that he doesn't really know him.)
9. "I ain't doing nothing wrong . . . just got there with the first knife." (Chapter 7, p. 154)
(Cal is being pressured so much that he decides to "cut" himself from the team. The knife imagery is appropriate because it foreshadows the knife used to stab him to death — "cut" off his life.)
10. "You don't know nothing about no basketball." (Chapter 9, p. 183)
(This reaction is by a youngster who watches Lonnie miss a basket at the end of the novel. The boy is where Lonnie used to be at the beginning of the novel. It is the classic theme of experience versus youth. Lonnie's experiences have given him insight and will help him to become a better person. This young man represents the angry, immature, rebellious Lonnie before Cal touched his life.)

COMPREHENSION STUDY

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the novel.

Questions 1-6 Literal Level

1. What does Lonnie's father mean by "his days were piling up on him"?
(Lonnie's father probably means that things are happening so quickly that he is losing track of time. He could also mean that he has too many responsibilities. The latter is more probable since he has abandoned his family.)
2. Characterize Lonnie's mother.
(Lonnie's mother is presented from Lonnie's point of view, so it is quite biased. But from what is stated, his mother is a lonely woman who wants to be loved by her husband and son. She does not, however, know how to communicate with them — she begs her husband to stay with her and she uses guilt on Lonnie. Her badgering masks her pain. It is also important to note that Lonnie is going through adolescence, a difficult time for both the parents and the teen.)
3. Indicate the significance of the holdup scene at the beginning of the novel.
(Since the novel takes place in Harlem, New York, this scene gives the reader a view of what living in Harlem is all about. It further identifies the reasons why so many young people either seek to escape — Paul, for instance — or assimilate into the environment — Lonnie's stealing the liquor.)
4. What information is given about Lonnie's relationship with Paul and Mary Ann?
(Lonnie has known Paul and Mary Ann (and their brother Freddie) all of his life. But recently Lonnie and Paul have drifted apart because Paul has begun to associate with what Lonnie calls "la-di-da" friends — middle class, light skinned blacks. Paul feels that his new associates will guarantee his exit out of the ghetto. On the other hand, Lonnie and Mary Ann's friendship develops into a mature love. By the end of the novel, the reader is led to believe that Lonnie and Mary Ann will be together in the future.)
5. Explain the importance of the basketball tournament.
(The 64 teams involved in the tournament consist of young

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men who either have not played on a high school team or who have played on inferior teams. The elimination rounds lead to the championship game where college scouts are present to offer scholarships and other opportunities to talented ball players. To most of these players, basketball is their ticket out of poverty.)

6. Trace how Cal gains Lonnie's respect as a player, coach, and a friend.

(Cal beats Lonnie twice when they play one-on-one. The first time Lonnie's excuse is that he did not take the game seriously. The second time Lonnie has to admit that Cal's skills are superior. It is after this game that Lonnie begins to change his mind about Cal. When Cal opens his life to Lonnie, he gains the young man's empathy and respect.

Once Cal has gained Lonnie's respect as a player, Lonnie gradually begins to allow Cal to instruct him on his game. At first, Lonnie feels that he cannot be taught because he is the "best." However, after Cal shares his famous shot with him, Lonnie is open to whatever Cal has to teach him about life, love, and his career.

Finally, the player-coach becomes the friend.)

Questions 7-9 Interpretive Level

7. Why does Lonnie react violently when Cal does not show up with the team's uniforms?

(Lonnie admits to himself that he misses Cal, and he is as disappointed as the other team members. Since Lonnie has begun to allow himself to feel, his reaction is not unusual. Here is a person who has begun to open himself to love, hurt, etc. His father has already stripped him emotionally. He can't afford to let Cal "get to him." His hurt and disappointment lead to anger; his anger leads to violence.)

8. Discuss the significance of the scrapbook.

(Of course, it is a chronicle of Cal's career, but the "scraps," as Cal states, are the pieces of his life. Towards the end of the novel, Lonnie picks the book off the floor. This gesture symbolizes Lonnie helping to pick up the pieces of Cal's life before he dies.)

9. What do people like Tyrone and O'Donnel symbolize in the novel?

(More than just good guys and bad guys, they represent the obstacles that stand in the way of those who try to excel.)

Questions 10-12 Critical Level

10. Share your feelings about the novel.
11. Are the characters and situations realistic?
12. Evaluate the ending.

Questions 13-14 Creative Level

13. Create a scene in which Lonnie and his mother and father meet for the first time in years. How have the characters changed?
14. Illustrate major scenes from the novel. (For example, Lonnie's first encounter with Cal, Cal sharing his scrapbook with Lonnie, Lonnie's winning basket, etc.)

ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

History

Research Harlem as a Dutch settlement.

Art

1. Create a collage using sports ads and slogans.
2. Design a book jacket for the novel. Include a review on the leaf of the jacket.
3. Make a model of a basketball court. Use clay, cardboard, etc.

Music

1. Compose a song which depicts the life and death of Calvin Jones.
2. Listen to and discuss the recurring themes in selected songs written by Fats Waller.

Math

Call a local finance company and investigate their present interest rates and payment plans. Calculate how long it would take to pay back \$10,000 at the lowest monthly rate.

Speech

Prepare and present Cal's eulogy.

Health

1. Prepare a pamphlet on drinking and athletics. Stress the importance of athletes following a proper regimen of exercise, diet, and rest. Include the need for athletes to avoid drugs and alcohol.
2. Visit a local health museum and focus the visit on the hazards of drug and alcohol abuse.

Drama

Role play one of the following scenes:

- a. Cal being interrogated by the NBA commissioner
- b. Lonnie and Cal's first encounter
- c. Tyrone catching Mary Ann stealing from his office

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Research and report on one of the following sports heroes mentioned in the novel:
 - a. Oscar Robertson
 - b. Muhammad Ali
 - c. Satchel Paige
 - d. Rick Barry
2. Prepare a pamphlet (3-5 pages) on one of the following:
 - a. Being a Man Means
 - b. How to Make Friends
 - c. Reputation is Everything
 - d. How Parents Can Improve Communications with Their Teens
 - e. What Makes a Good Father?
3. Prepare a glossary of basketball terms for display.
4. Read aloud an interesting excerpt from the novel.
5. Research physical abuse against women and children.

ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

1. Explain how the novel would change if the following events occurred:
 - a. Cal recovered from his knife wound;
 - b. Lonnie's father returned;
 - c. Lonnie's team had lost the championship game;
 - d. Cal had been reinstated in the NBA;
 - e. Mary Ann had become pregnant.
2. Compose the story which Lonnie had indicated to Aggie that he had written. Use the language which Lonnie uses

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in the novel.

3. Prepare and present a soliloquy as Calvin Jones. Speculate on his life before the NBA, discuss his career choices and his downfall, indicate his feelings about losing his son and his wife, and explain his feelings towards his relationship with Lonnie and the team he coached.

OTHER BOOKS BY WALTER DEAN MYERS

Picture Books

Where Does The Day Go? 1969
The Dragon Takes A Wife, 1972
The Dancers, 1972
Fly, Jimmy, Fly! 1974
The Black Pearl And The Ghost; Or, One Mystery After Another, 1980
Mr. Monkey And The Gotcha Bird, 1984

Novels

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 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
Motown And Didi: A Love Story, 1984
The Outside Shot, 1984
Sweet Illusions, 1986
Crystal, 1987
Scorpions, 1988
Me, Mop, And The Moondance Kid, 1988
Fallen Angels, 1988
The Mouse Rap, 1990
Somewhere In the Darkness, 1992
Mop, Moondance, And The Nagasaki Knights, 1992
The Righteous Revenge Of Artemis Bonner, 1992

"The Arrow" Series

Adventure In Granada, 1985
The Hidden Shrine, 1985
Duel In The Desert, 1986
Ambush In The Amazon, 1986

Other

The World Of Work: A Guide To Choosing A Career, 1975
Social Welfare, 1976
Malcolm X: By Any Means Necessary, 1993

RELATED READING

Bonham, Frank. *The Rascals From Haskell's Gym*.
Christopher, Matt. *The Hit-Away Kid*.
— . *Tackle Without A Team*.
Cohen, Barbara. *Thank You, Jackie Robinson*.
Glenn, Mel. *Squeeze Play: A Baseball Story*.
Knudson, R.R. *Rinehart Lifts*.
Park, Barbara. *Skinnybones*.
Slote, Alfred. *Matt Gargan's Boy*.

— . *Rabbit Ears*.

— . *Tony And Me*.

Teague, Sam. *The King Of Hearts' Heart*.

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Chevalier, Tracy, ed. *Twentieth Century Children's Writers*.
Chicago: St. James Press, 1989.
Hendrickson, Linnea. *Children's Literature: A Guide to the Criticism*. Boston: G.K. Hall Co., 1987.
Rush, Theresa G., ed. *Black American Writers: Past and Present*. New Jersey: Scarecrow, 1975.
Something About The Author. Vol. 71. Detroit: Gale, 1993.

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BASIC THEME: FRIENDSHIP

Respond to the following on friendship. Be prepared to share your comments with the class.

1. Define friend.
2. List the qualities you feel are necessary for a person to be a friend.
3. Explain why each quality is important to you.
4. Write a brief paragraph explaining why your best friend is your best friend.

READING COMPREHENSION: SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

Below is a list of actions taken by Lonnie. Number each in the order in which they occur.

- _____ 1. steals money from Tyrone's office
- _____ 2. fights Paul at the center
- _____ 3. shoots winning basket in championship game
- _____ 4. meets a wino at playground
- _____ 5. goes to Highbridge to investigate stolen checks
- _____ 6. pays a bondsman to release Cal from jail
- _____ 7. steals scotch from delivery truck
- _____ 8. attends Cal's funeral
- _____ 9. dines with Cal and Sweet Man
- _____ 10. shoots himself in the hand

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DIALOGUES AND DESCRIPTIONS

Below are three situations that could have appeared in *Hoops*. Complete each description or conversation as the characters would have. Try to use the characters' language and style as revealed in the novel.

1. Lonnie accompanies Mary Ann to the hospital.
2. Lonnie goes with Cal to meet Tyrone and Juno.
3. Lonnie visits Aggie five years later.

CHARACTERIZATION: FEELINGS

In *Hoops* Lonnie tries to deny his feelings about the people around him. Listed below are emotions Lonnie tries to mask. Find examples from the novel which indicate how Lonnie responds to each emotion.

1. anger
2. disappointment
3. love
4. fear
5. pride

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

There are two types of characters: dynamic (those who change during the course of the novel) and static (those who remain the same). Lonnie is a dynamic character and his change is central to the novel. Answer the following questions using examples from the novel. Be prepared to discuss your responses with your class.

1. What is Lonnie like at the beginning of the novel?
2. What is he like at the end of the novel?
3. How has he changed? What changes are positive? Negative?

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FIGURES OF SPEECH: SIMILES

Myers uses realistic language in *Hoops*. One figure of speech used throughout is the simile. A simile is a comparison of two seemingly unlike things using the comparison words *like* or *as*. In each of the following what two things are compared? Follow the form in the example below. Which comparisons do you like best?

EXAMPLE: So it's Henri gets to make the wallets and lanyards and sing the national anthem while the flag is raised every morning and swim in a lake warm as blood. [lake and blood]

1. . . . you gonna lay your days out in front of yourself like an imaginary road.
2. He rolled over and got up on his knees and hands like a boxer trying to beat the count.
3. The pain went up my arm like somebody was running an iron up my veins.
4. Cal was like a zombie in the cab and going up the stairs.
5. . . . he was on my case like a hungry dog on a pork chop.
6. The rest of the game went down like death in an old folk's home.
7. In Ox's huge black hands the dead bird looked like a child's feather toy.
8. This guy (Cal) was getting to be like a hole in the ground that you couldn't see the bottom of.

Write a descriptive paragraph using at least five similes.

VOCABULARY: SLANG

Below are ten underlined word groups in the context in which they appear in the novel. Read each sentence and, using the context clues given, write a possible definition for each word.

1. I could earn a few bucks, and I could crash there when my moms got on my back too much. (p. 2, 1.5)
2. I busted down the stairs and into the street. (p. 5, 1.3)
3. That ticked him off because he was always falling for something like that. (p. 64, 1.5)
4. "Yeah, that way the only way they can bust me is to catch me copping some more checks, and there's no way I'm going to do that." (p. 94, 1.1)
5. When I go there, Mary Ann was waiting in the lobby, rapping with Harrison. (p. 106, 1.3)
6. I'd peeped that whole show-your-teeth, shuck and jive scene before. (p. 40, 1.4)
7. "One day you my ace boon and the next day I don't know you." (p. 91, 1.7)
8. "How come you never hit on me?" (p. 127, 1.10)
9. "I didn't have no dust, so I took some checks from the mailbox . . ." (p. 93, 1.6)
10. That was a downer because everybody wanted to get their flick in the paper. (p. 100, 1.28)

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VOCABULARY TEST

Select words from the list below to complete each sentence that follows.

abode	commitment	marathon	sponsor
adverse	consult	mediocre	stabilize
autograph	detrimental	scam	tournament
bondsman	forfeit	shambles	ventriloquist
clamoring	intimidating	showcase	zombie

1. It was like I was running a _____.
2. That bird is actually a _____. Ox is the one who can't talk.
3. He could have been a freak or into some antipoverty _____.
4. "You are welcome to accompany me to my _____."
5. He had underlined some words: "associating with known gamblers and behaving in a manner _____ to the interests of the National Basketball Association . . ."
6. "Then give me your _____ and I'll save it for later."
7. "What I want to know is how we're going to handle any _____ publicity if it does occur."
8. The place was a _____. Everything that had been standing had been thrown over.
9. The whole thing was too close to us, too real, and too _____ to let on that we even knew about it.
10. Mary Ann had been wrong when she said that I didn't want to make it different because I didn't want to make a _____ to her.
11. We played one game without Cal and lost to a _____ team from Staten Island.
12. "We give that to the _____, and he'll get Cal out."
13. Cal was like a _____ in the cab and going up the stairs.
14. We played five games in three days against the other teams in our _____.
15. The television guys were interviewing some of the kids, and the rest were _____ around, mugging for the cameras.

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COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: True/False (30 points)

Mark each statement either T for true or F if any part is false.

- _____ 1. Lonnie Jackson is eighteen years old and a high school dropout.
- _____ 2. Lonnie frequently resides at the Grant Hotel, his place of employment.
- _____ 3. Lonnie and Cal meet for the first time at the tournament.
- _____ 4. When practice begins, Lonnie does not show up because his mother is hospitalized.
- _____ 5. Mary Ann believes her brother Paul is involved in illegal activities.
- _____ 6. When Cal doesn't show up with the team's uniforms, Lonnie attempts to shoot him.
- _____ 7. Cal is openly hostile when scouts approach his team.
- _____ 8. Cal shows an old scrapbook to the team when they visit.
- _____ 9. Calvin (Spider) Jones used to play pro ball but was caught shaving points.
- _____ 10. Mary Ann and Lonnie find out that Paul has stolen welfare checks when they break into Tyrone's office.
- _____ 11. Cal and Lonnie visit a man named O'Donnel who wants Cal to make Lonnie his assistant.
- _____ 12. When Cal is released from jail, his mother and father are waiting with open arms.
- _____ 13. Cal decides to quit coaching the team since Sweet Man Johnson has agreed to take his place.
- _____ 14. In the final game, Harlem beats Manhattan by one point.
- _____ 15. After the game, Cal has a heart attack due to overexertion.

Part II: Quotation Identification (20 points)

Which characters make the following statements? Write the letter of your answer in the space provided.

- _____ 1. If you think you should withdraw as coach . . . well, I could understand it.
- _____ 2. How come you never hit on me?
- _____ 3. It's something black women learn.
- _____ 4. Tyrone figured out the money.
- _____ 5. That's my life you got there in your hands.
- _____ 6. One day you my ace boon and the next day I don't know you.
- _____ 7. I figure there are going to be a lot of Tyrones and O'Donnels, you know, good guys and bad guys, that I'm going to have to learn to deal with.
- _____ 8. I'm going into Tyrone's drawer and get that envelope with Paul's name on it.
- _____ 9. I felt like I wanted to prove something, you know. Like I was okay for her to like, maybe.
- _____ 10. How many times you got to be hurt before you know where the pain is coming from?

A. Lonnie
B. Mary Ann

C. Paul
D. O'Donnel

E. Cal
F. Aggie

G. Tyrone
H. Juno

HOOPS

Part III: Identification (20 points)

Discuss the significance of the following items as they relate to the plot of the novel. Be specific.

1. feets too big
2. \$15 apiece
3. Coney Island
4. skag
5. Grant Hotel

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

1. Discuss how one of the following themes is expressed in the novel.
 - A. Need for a Father
 - B. The "Game" of Life
 - C. Cal's Search for Self
 - D. That's What Friends are For
 - E. A Boy Needs a Father

2. Examine Lonnie's growth in the novel. Use specifics to show his development.

HOOPS

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Completion (20 points)

Fill in the following blanks with words or phrases which will complete each statement. Place your answer in the blanks provided at left.

- _____ 1. The novel takes place in _____.
- _____ 2. Lonnie steals a case of _____ during a holdup.
- _____ 3. Lonnie and Mary Ann find a(n) _____ with Paul's name on it.
- _____ 4. When Lonnie visits Cal's apartment, Cal shares his _____ with him.
- _____ 5. Paul's father is ordered to serve _____ to some whites on his job.
- _____ 6. Cal's son dies in _____.
- _____ 7. Tyrone injects _____ into Mary Ann's veins.
- _____ 8. Lonnie goes to _____ to investigate stolen checks.
- _____ 9. Harlem wins the championship by _____ point(s).
- _____ 10. Trying to shoot Cal, Lonnie shoots _____.

Part II: Completion (30 points)

Identify the characters described below. Choose from the list of names that follows.

- | | | |
|---------|-------------------|----------|
| Lonnie | O'Donnel | Ox |
| Nesbitt | Tyrone | Cal |
| Jo-Jo | Juno | Mary Ann |
| Paul | Sweet Man Johnson | Breeze |
| Aggie | Roy | Lenny |

- _____ 1. is envied by Lonnie because he has befriended Paul.
- _____ 2. loses his bird.
- _____ 3. owns the gym where the Harlem team meets.
- _____ 4. demands that Cal cease coaching.
- _____ 5. loses a bundle in the final game.
- _____ 6. confronts his father who has abandoned him.
- _____ 7. is Tyrone's bodyguard.
- _____ 8. loses a game of one-on-one to Cal
- _____ 9. steals \$300 to pay for Cal's bail.
- _____ 10. has played pro ball with Cal.
- _____ 11. stabs Cal with a knife.
- _____ 12. is an ex-singer.
- _____ 13. has sold his game for a few dollars.
- _____ 14. along with Mary Ann, breaks into Tyrone's office.
- _____ 15. steals checks from mailboxes.

HOOPS

Part III: Description (20 points)

Put an X by every statement that is true of Lonnie.

- 1. Lives with his parents in Manhattan.
- 2. Stabs Juno after an important game.
- 3. Is the best player on his team.
- 4. Loves a girl named Mary Ann.
- 5. Writes short stories.
- 6. Takes over when Cal is absent.
- 7. Shoots his arm accidentally.
- 8. Visits Aggie after Cal's death.
- 9. Fights with his best friend over a girl.
- 10. Agrees to sell drugs for Ugly.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

1. Argue whether or not Calvin Jones is a tragic hero.

2. Examine the three women in the novel. How realistically are they portrayed?

HOOPS

ANSWER KEY

Reading Comprehension: Sequence of Events

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

Figures of Speech: Similes

1. days—road
2. he—boxer
3. pain—iron
4. Cal—zombie
5. he—dog
6. game—death
7. bird—toy
8. guy—hole

Vocabulary: Slang

- | | |
|----------------|----------------|
| 1. stay | 6. experienced |
| 2. ran | 7. friend |
| 3. angered him | 8. flirt with |
| 4. stealing | 9. money |
| 5. talking | 10. picture |

Vocabulary Test

- | | |
|------------------|-----------------|
| 1. marathon | 9. intimidating |
| 2. ventriloquist | 10. commitment |
| 3. scam | 11. mediocre |
| 4. abode | 12. bondsman |
| 5. detrimental | 13. zombie |
| 6. autograph | 14. tournament |
| 7. adverse | 15. clamoring |
| 8. shambles | |

Comprehension Test A

Part I: True/False (30 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 9. T |
| 2. T | 10. T |
| 3. F | 11. F |
| 4. F | 12. F |
| 5. T | 13. F |
| 6. T | 14. T |
| 7. T | 15. F |
| 8. F | |

Part II: Quotation Identification (20 points)

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

Part III: Identification (20 points)

1. the song Cal sang at the playground when he first encountered Lonnie
2. how much Paul earned per stolen check
3. where Lonnie takes Mary Ann after her hospitalization
4. the drug injected in Mary Ann's veins by Tyrone
5. where Lonnie works and resides

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Completion (20 points)

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Harlem | 6. a fire |
| 2. scotch (liquor) | 7. heroin or skag |
| 3. envelope | 8. Highbridge |
| 4. scrapbook | 9. one |
| 5. coffee | 10. his hand |

Part II: Completion (30 points)

- | | |
|-------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Lenny | 9. Mary Ann |
| 2. Ox | 10. Sweet Man Johnson |
| 3. Nesbitt | 11. Tyrone |
| 4. O'Donnel | 12. Aggie |
| 5. Tyrone | 13. Cal |
| 6. Cal | 14. Lonnie |
| 7. Juno | 15. Paul |
| 8. Lonnie | |

Part III: Description (20 points)

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

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

TEACHER'S NOTES



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