



# 145th Street

by Walter Dean Myers

## Teacher's Guide

Written By Laurie Rozakis, Ph.D.

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## Synopsis

**Note: The collection is a series of 10 interlocking short stories. Instead of chapter numbers, the chapters have story titles.**

### Big Joe's Funeral Affable

Big Joe wants to enjoy his funeral party, so he organizes his own funeral while he is still alive. As owner of the highly successful Big Joe's Bar-B-Que and Burger Restaurant, Big Joe has the available capital to spend on the bash. Joe invites Leroy Brown and his band to perform. Big Joe is very popular in the neighborhood not only because he is good-natured but also because he is generous and helpful to one and all. All this upsets a teenager named Peaches, who resents the love between Big Joe and her mother because she feels that her mother should still be in mourning for her dead husband.

The party is held on July 4. The day is blazingly hot, but the funeral parlor is air conditioned. The mourners pass by the coffin to gaze at Leroy, who doesn't even twitch. After that, the mourners go to the burial site. Peaches and her girlfriends set up their boom box and play "I'll be Glad When You're Dead, You Rascal You!" as loud as they can. The police demand that she turn down the music. The coffin is lowered into the ground. Then the top opens and Big Joe pops out. He shakes everyone's hand and says, "Let the party begin!" The police break into the merriment looking for drugs in a coffin, a reminder that reality is never far away in Harlem. The police realize that they have the wrong coffin. After this unpleasantness, the party kicks off and everyone has a wonderful time.

### The Baddest Dog in Harlem

The kids are sitting on the railing outside Big Joe's restaurant, killing time by talking about various prize fighters. The police come by to investigate a shooting

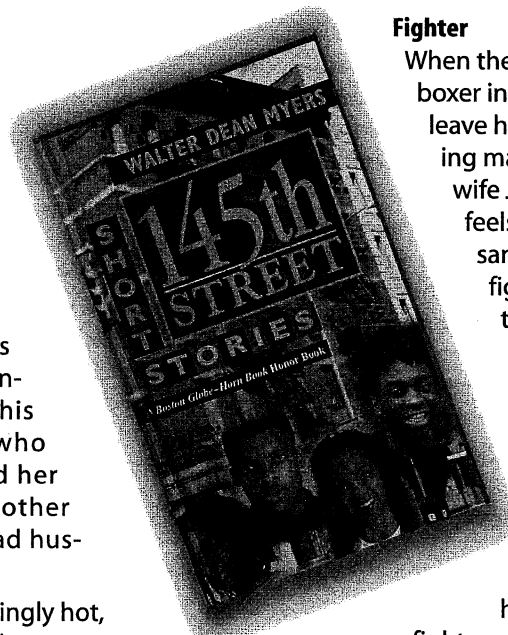
concerning a man with an automatic weapon. The police shoot and Willie is injured. Mary, the apartment owner, is furious because the police made a mess in her apartment with all the bullets. She demands retribution. The scene gets more upsetting when the police discover that they killed Mary's dog. The scene becomes tragic when the police discover that they killed a small child as well.

### Fighter

When the story opens, Billy Giles, the boxer in the title, is getting ready to leave his home for that evening's boxing match. He promises to bring his wife Johnnie Mae some ice cream. He feels a little sick to his stomach, the same feeling he gets before each fight. At the gym, he thinks about the first time he fought for his manager Manny. He has been fighting for three years now, but is still on the bottom. Whether he wins or loses, he will make \$145 for the bout. Billy watches a boxer named Jimmy Walls warm up. Billy recalls how his wife does not want him to fight any more. He fights to earn enough money to pay his bills and give his wife and baby a few treats. Billy fights Danny Vega, a young Puerto Rican about his age. During the fight, Billy understands why Vega has been described as a "comer": he fights hard and is clearly trying to make a name for himself. In a flashback, Billy remembers how Johnnie Mae encouraged him to go to school, but when a counselor told him that he was wasting his time, he dropped out for good. Back in the present, Billy is knocked down. The fight over, Billy gets his money and leaves, but he is unable to pick up the ice cream because the store is closed. He is grateful for his wife's love and gentleness amid all the pain of boxing and life.

### Angela's Eyes

When Angela Luz Colon's father Ferdando is killed in his taxi, 12-year-old Angela starts having sad dreams that seem to predict the future for an unlucky few. First she



dreams that Poli, the old man who worked in Mr. Rodriguez's bodega, will die—and he does, of a heart attack. Then she dreams that Eddie will die and he is hit by a truck and dies. Mrs. Flores is terrified of Angela's dreams and forbids the child to look at her. Consuela Ortiz wants Angela to predict if her mysterious pain presages her death. Meanwhile, Angela is having visions of many people dying in a terrible war. Angela's dreams never leave her, but eventually everyone loses their fear of her.

### **The Streak**

Fast-talking Jamie Farrell, a smooth basketball player, has a terrible streak of bad luck: he messes up a shot during a game, he drops a milk carton and the milk splashes on a classmate, he discovers after he buys fast food that he has left his wallet home, and he fails an English test. His best friend Froggy Williams explains that Jamie is on a bad "streak." When the streak ends, he will have an equal number of good events happen to him. Sure enough, the streak ends and many good things happen to Jamie: he throws an egg and it lands right in the egg carton, he does well on a math quiz, he gets a soda from a supposedly broken soda machine, his father gives him \$100, and so on. Jamie hopes that his streak of good luck doesn't end before he can ask out Celia Evora, "the finest chick in the school." Ironically, Celia feels that she is on a good streak and so asks Jamie to the dance. Both kids are delighted at the way their good fortune has turned out.

### **Monkeyman**

A gang called the "Tigros" moves into the neighborhood. Monkeyman, a quiet and bookish lad, saves Peaches from a razor slashing by a female Tigros. In retaliation, the male Tigros go after him. Monkeyman brings his grandfather, Mr. Nesbitt, and godmother Sister Smith to the attack. He is badly beaten by gang members but his quiet and courageous stand against the gang earns everyone's respect.

### **Kitty and Mack: A Love Story**

Eddie McCormick, called "Mack," is a much-admired athlete. Talented but arrogant, he sails through life until he meets Kitty. She is brilliant, determined, and beautiful. When Kitty expresses her love for Mack in a poem that she reads aloud in English class, they become an inseparable couple. Christmas Eve, Mack is injured in an accident and his foot must be amputated. He falls into a terrible depression, even attempting suicide. Kitty drops out of school to care for him. Her unwavering love for Mack pulls him back from the brink of death and despair.

### **A Christmas Story**

Mother Fletcher is a very old and respected black woman in Harlem, although no one knows her exact age. One day, Mother Fletcher calls for an ambulance and police officer O'Brien responds. To show her appreciation after she recovers, Mother Fletcher hand-knits him a green sweater. When O'Brien tells Mother Fletcher that his wife had been jealous of the sweater, she knits one for his wife as well. Officer O'Brien does not believe that police officers should socialize with Harlem residents, so when Mother Fletcher invites him and his family for Christmas, he says yes but has no intention of showing up. His wife insists they honor his promise, and the family (including daughter Meaghan) does indeed go to Mother Fletcher's home. The O'Brien family finds that Mother Fletcher is all prepared with a sumptuous feast of ham and the trimmings. They teach each other the true meaning of Christmas and sharing.

### **A Story In Three Parts**

Big Time Henson senses his drug addiction drawing him closer and closer to an early grave. Nonetheless, he cannot fight his addiction. He asks Miss Pat for money, which she gives him. She tells him a story about a slave woman who killed her children rather than sell them. In the next section, Big Time buys his cocaine from Sweet Jimmy and gets high. In the third section, Big Time finds himself trapped on the roof with a child named Benny. A fire breaks out and Benny looks to Big Time to save him. Big Time realizes that being grown up doesn't mean anything, as he says. Nonetheless, he manages to save them by jumping to the next building.

### **Block Party-145th Street Style**

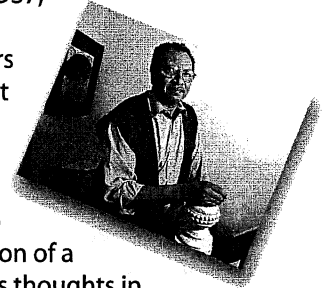
Squeezeie, a fifteen-year-old girl and Peaches's best friend, is the narrator. With residents that range from young children to Mr. Lynch, "so old he had washed dishes at the Last Supper," the neighborhood celebrates with a big block party. Peaches is still opposed to Big Joe marrying her mother, but she has saved \$200 for a wedding gift. Instead of buying the gift, she impulsively gives the money to J.T., a hoodlum valiantly trying to help his mother. Big Joe rescues J.T. and his mother and sets them up in an apartment. Squeezeie uses her own money to buy Big Joe and Peaches's mother a nice wedding gift, some lamps.

## Timeline

- February 1919** First Pan African Congress organized by W.E.B. Du Bois, Paris.
- June to Sept.** Race riots in Washington, D.C., Chicago, Charleston, Knoxville, Omaha, and elsewhere.
- September** Race Relations Commission founded.
- August 1920** 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.
- March 21, 1924** Civic Club Dinner brings black writers - and white publishers together. This is the formal launching of the New Negro movement.
- October 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.
- February 1929** Negro Experimental Theater founded
- October 29 1933** Black Thursday Stock Exchange crash. 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 in an autobiographical essay, "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 African-American children, Myers began cutting school and making deliveries for drug dealers. 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 did not 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. By the time he was laid off seven years later, Myers was able to support himself by his writing alone.

In *Interracial Books For Children Bulletin*, Myers described his priorities as a writer. 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.

## Critics 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 several times. 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." Publishers Weekly gave *145th Street* a starred review, calling the collection of ten stories set in Harlem, "a kind of literary *Rear Window*. Myers creates snapshots of a pulsing, vibrant community with diverse ethnic threads, through all of its ups and downs." Reviewer Edward Sullivan, writing in *School Library Journal*, noted that "Myers gets a bit sentimental at times, especially in 'A Christmas Story,' but there's enough balance here among the emotions to make *145th Street* a highly enjoyable short-story collection. What one comes away with after reading it is a vivid sense of place and a vibrant feeling of community." *Kirkus* was equally laudatory: "Myers ... keeps the ball rolling with ten strong tales of laughter and tragedy, good choices and risky ones, love and death, all set on a single Harlem block. ... Myers weaves the sweet and the bitter into a vibrant urban fabric."

## Other Works By Walter Dean Myers

*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*, 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*, 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 Biddy Owens, The Negro Leagues*, 2001.  
*Patrol*, 2001.  
*Handbook For Boys*, 2002.  
*Three Swords for Granada*, 2002.  
*The Dream Bearer*, 2003.

## 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 grasp the author's use of dialect
2. To understand the novel's title
3. To recognize the importance of setting
4. To assess each character's personality
5. To recognize the theme collections 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 life in Harlem
10. To evaluate the author's point of view

## Specific Objectives

1. To appreciate the joy in Big Joe's mock funeral
2. To analyze how Myers uses dialect to capture the flavor of life in Harlem
3. To analyze the juxtaposition of violence and joy in Harlem
4. To determine why Billy Giles keeps boxing, even though his wife wants him to quit
5. To understand how Angela's visions affect her friends and neighbors
6. To analyze the Christ imagery in "Monkeyman"
7. To probe why Kitty quits school to help Mack recover
8. To trace the plot structure
9. To consider the lessons the book teaches about life in Harlem
10. To understand what the block party at the end of the novel symbolizes

## Literary Terms And Applications

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

**description** a word picture of what something or someone is like. Description is made up of sensory details that help readers form pictures in their minds. Myers's style in *145th Street* is highly descriptive, as this excerpt from page 102 shows: "His sobs filled the barbershop. Outside, the cross town bus hissed past on the wet street. Earl was backing his van into the narrow parking lot, and brothers and sisters, already late for work, rushed toward the subway station on the boulevard." Notice how the description appeals to touch and sound as well as sight.

**dialect** the way that people speak in a certain region or area. In a dialect, certain words are spelled and pronounced differently. Writers use dialects to describe their characters and setting more fully. Myers uses some dialect in *145th Street* to help readers visualize the setting and characters. For example: "The Tigros hit the 'hood gradually, like the turning of a season. First we saw some tags scrawled on the wall near the Pioneer Supermarket." The words "hit," "'hood," and "tags" are examples of dialect.

**figurative language** words and expressions not meant to be taken literally. Figurative language uses words in fresh, new ways to appeal to the imagination. Figurative language includes similes, metaphors, extended metaphors, hyperbole, and personification. What is impossible or difficult to convey to a reader through the literal use of language may be highly possible through the use of figurative language. Myers uses figurative language liberally to create a lyrical, almost poetic style. This is evident in Myers's description of Mother Fletcher, for instance: "Her gray hair, still streaked with wisps of black and thinner on the sides than on the top, framed her face and, catching the light, made her look like a black version of a medieval saint." This simile conveys Mother Fletcher's essential goodness as well as her beauty.

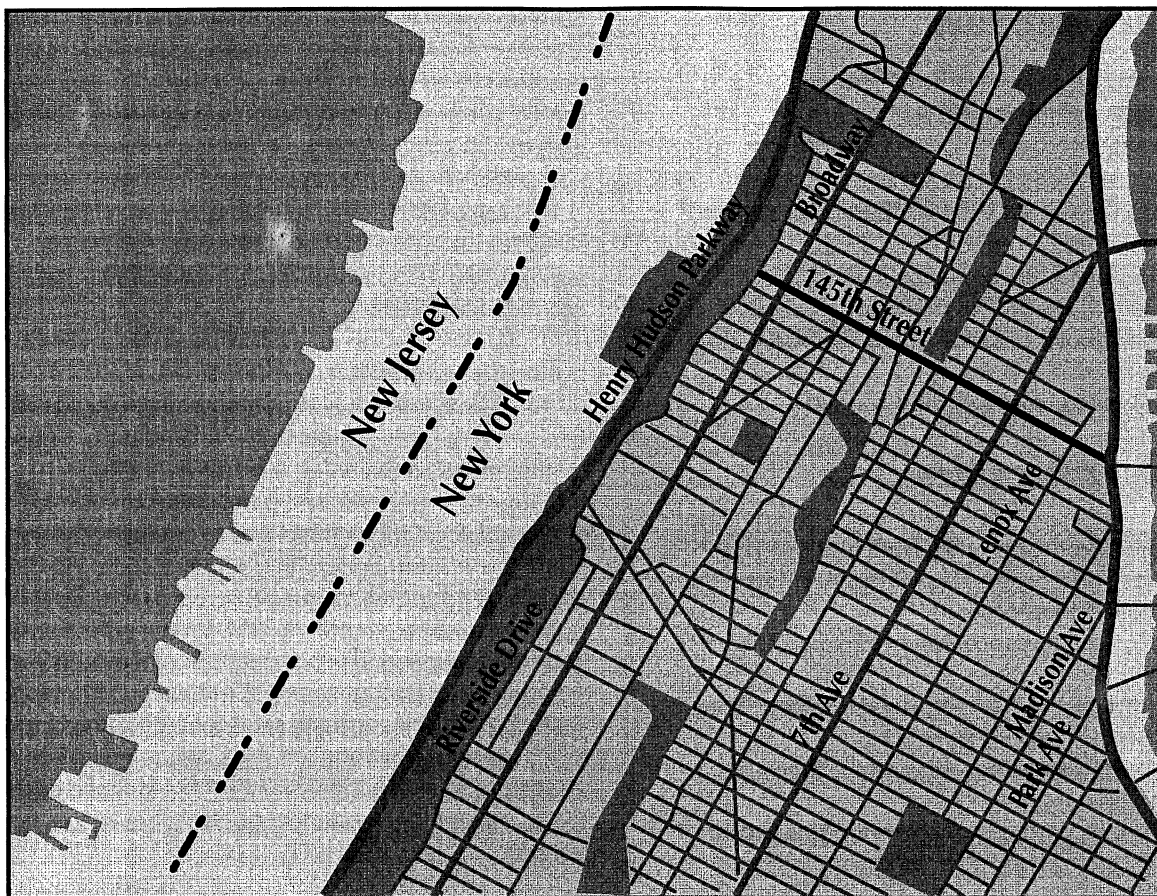
## Cross-Curricular Sources

### Fiction

William Armstrong, *Souder*  
 Sharon Draper, *Tears of a Tiger*  
 Sharon Draper, *Forged by Fire*  
 Christopher Paul Curtis, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*  
 Christopher Paul Curtis, *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* by Walter Dean Myers  
*Fallen Angels* by Walter Dean Myers  
*Bad Boy* by Walter Dean Myers  
*Shooter* by Walter Dean Myers  
*Slam* by Walter Dean Myers

**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**

Walter Dean Myers page  
[www.scils.rutgers.edu/~kvander/myers.html](http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~kvander/myers.html)  
Scholastic Web site  
<http://teacher.scholastic.com/>

**The Importance Of Setting**

The centrality of the setting is evident from the book's title: *145th Street*. The stories in this book could not have taken place anywhere but the historic cultural nexus of African-American life in America. Today, Harlem has a reputation for urban decay and racial tension, but it 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 110th Street, south of 151th 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.

## Themes And Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Walter Dean Myers's *145th Street* should include these aspects:

### Themes

- prejudice
- hatred
- family love
- fear
- courage
- gangs
- peer pressure
- friendship
- racism
- death

### Motifs

- combating prejudice by speaking your mind and being tolerant
- showing hatred against others by acts of violence
- engendering family love by being loyal and loving
- fearing gangs and individual bullies
- displaying courage by refusing to go with the crowd
- learning about the culture of Harlem
- withstanding peer pressure and not withstanding it
- risking your life to save another person's life
- reading and understanding dialect
- being brave in terrifying situations

## Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have particular meaning in the collections. Explain the meaning of each. Chapter and page numbers indicate the context from which the item is taken.

1. "It is true what they said about shooting a dog?" Willie asked. (p. 25)  
*(A police raid has gone tragically wrong as the police send volleys of shots into an apartment. They do indeed shoot and kill a dog but they also kill a child. The narrator feels a wave of pain when he looks at*

*the dead body, for the child could be his little brother or his cousin or any other child he knows. This tragic story encapsulates all the pain and violence of the ghetto.)*

2. "Sometimes," Mr. Rodriguez said, cutting up chickens for his meat case, "things happen that hurt us deeply, even though it's something we think we should hold on to it's usually better to let it go." (p. 53)  
*(Mr. Rodriguez is referring to Angela's grief over her father's death—he was murdered in his taxi cab—but Angela assumes that he is alluding to her disturbing dreams of death. Nonetheless, Mr. Rodriguez nods, because he wants to offer the child what comfort he can. This incident shows the compassion of some people in Harlem, and how they try to make life better for others.)*
3. "I just figured out that the whole world is on a streak," I said. (p. 72)  
*(Myers uses the term "streak" here to refer to a run of good or bad luck. This comment suggests that the entire world runs on a cycle of good and bad, totally out of human control.)*
4. The high streetlamps outside the park cast a pale glare on Monkeyman's dark skin. The shadow on the ground, of Monkeyman's body being offered up for a beating, was long and thin and disappeared into the shifting knot of people watching. (p. 83)  
*(In his goodness and passive acceptance of moral transgressions, Monkeyman becomes a symbol of Christ. The author reinforces this imagery by having the youth take off his shirt and "offer" himself up as a sacrifice. Monkeyman brings two other people with him, creating a trinity, and his godmother prays during the scene.)*
5. "I just thought that some people were going to show wrong, and others were going to show right," he said. (p. 85)  
*(The narrator had anticipated that the some people at the scene, perhaps even the gang members, would rise to the occasion and refuse Monkeyman's sacrifice. They would do the right thing by supporting the person who tries to save them, but no one does. Monkeyman is beaten that night, stabbed later, and ends up in the hospital. This shows the stark reality of life: people often wait for others to step up and fight injustice, but they rarely do.)*

6. "Kitty, I fell three times on the way over here." (p. 102)  
*(Mack feels that he cannot be a man to Kitty because he is missing a foot. He has clearly pegged his manhood on his appearance and physical strength. She sees beyond his outward form to his inward goodness. She tells him that no one knows what tomorrow will bring, but if they stick together, something good will happen. Kitty's actions show the heroism of unselfish love.)*
7. "Cause the more you expect, the more you get your heart broke up." (p. 115)  
*(Mother Fletcher shares her philosophy of life: Be prepared when people act properly because it makes living worthwhile. Her credo links this story to "Monkeyman," the teenager who stands up to the gang; "Kitty and Mack: A Love Story," for Kitty's selfless love; and "Block Party—145th Street Style," when Peaches gives her money to T.J. to help him support his mother.)*
8. "It wasn't usual for women to kill their children during slavery times." (p. 123)  
*(Miss Pat tells the cocaine-addicted Big Time about Doll, a slave who killed her own children rather than let them be sold from her. This story shows the pride of the black past and the desperate measures that often drive people to preserve their families. Miss Pat's message to Big Time is clear: save yourself and your family by getting off drugs.)*
10. "We can take care of it," Big Joe said. (p. 149)  
*(Big Joe calmly helps J.T. and his mother. Big Joe is a model of manhood and responsibility that transcends time and place. His actions show that some of the problems of poverty and the ghetto can be solved if people stick together and help each other.)*

## 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 novel take place?  
*(The short stories that comprise this novel are set in Harlem, a section of New York City, in the present.)*

2. How are the short stories linked together?  
*(All the stories concern the same characters, setting, and themes. The narrative begun in one—such as Big Joe wanting to marry Peaches' mother—is often continued in another.)*
3. Why does Big Joe stage his own funeral?  
*(He wants to be able to enjoy it while he is still alive. He enjoys giving pleasure to others as well by having a big party.)*
4. What visions does Angela have?  
*(Angela sees people that she knows dying. She also sees great scenes of warfare.)*
5. How do Big Time and Benny escape from the fire?  
*(After wasting a lot of time wishing that he had some drugs, Big Time finally grabs Benny's hand and together they jump to the roof of the next building. Big Time manages to throw Benny to the roof but he hangs over the edge. Benny goes for help, but in the meantime Big Time manages to pull himself up until he is able to roll his body to safety.)*

### Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)

6. What lesson does Officer O'Brien learn from Mother Fletcher?  
*(Officer O'Brien learns the importance of sharing to build cultural bridges and maintain your essential humanity.)*
7. What is the theme of the story of the slave woman Doll who killed her children rather than sell them? How does this story apply to Big Time and his life?  
*(The theme is the importance of withstanding oppression and taking action against injustice. Even if that action causes immense pain, it is important to get your freedom the best way you can.)*
8. In what way is Monkeyman a Christ symbol?  
*(Monkeyman, like Christ, stands up for injustice. He sacrifices himself so others can be safe. He is passive in his resistance.)*

### Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

9. Should Kitty have dropped out of school to help Mack? Why or why not?  
*(Students who agree with her action will applaud her stalwart love; those who disagree can argue that she could have served Mack and herself far better by staying in school and becoming a lawyer, as she had planned. This would also have helped the community.)*



10. How are Big Time and Big Joe the same? How are they different?  
(Both men are African-American residents of Harlem, but the similarities end there. Big Time is an immature drug addict who refuses to grow up; Big Joe is a mature adult who takes responsibility for himself and anyone else in the community who needs help.)

**Questions 11-12 (Creative Level)**

11. Writing as Squeezie, describe what life is like in the neighborhood ten years in the future.
12. Interpret the strange dream that Angela has about people dying in a war. Be ready to justify how you interpret each part of the dream.

**Across The Curriculum**

**Art/Music**

1. Design and draw a wedding dress that Peaches's mother might wear for her wedding to Big Joe.
2. Create a three-dimensional diorama of *145th Street*. Label each part of the display with an appropriate quote from the collection.
3. Make a poster advertising the fight of Billy Giles and Danny Vegas.
4. Make an invitation to the big block party.
5. Design a new cover for this book. Use color, shape, and graphics to capture the collection's main themes.

**Speech/Drama**

1. Working with some classmates, enact Big Joe's funeral.
2. Write a eulogy that you might deliver at Big Joe's mock funeral. In your speech, describe all his special traits. Then deliver your speech to a small group of classmates.
3. With a group of classmates, improvise the scene in which Billy Giles's guidance counselor tells him that he is wasting his time in school.
4. Demonstrate how to play basketball. Make a hand-out with the rules for your classmates.
5. With a panel of classmates, debate whether or not people do indeed experience streaks of good and bad luck.

**Language Arts**

1. Write a poem that Mack could send to Kitty in response to the poem that she wrote to him.
2. Make a glossary of the slang and dialect used in this collection, including words such as crib, 'hood, and jams. List at least 15 words and their meanings.
3. Write the police report describing what happened in "*The Baddest Dog in Harlem*."

4. Write a different ending to "*A Christmas Story*." Perhaps the O'Briens did not attend dinner at Mother Fletcher's home or perhaps the evening did not go as well, for instance.
5. Write the wedding vows for Peaches's mother and Big Joe.

**History/Social Studies**

1. Research the Harlem Renaissance.
2. Hold a school "block party" like the one described in the story "*Block Party—145th Street Style*." Invite all the classes in your grade or in your wing of the building to participate.
3. List the songs mentioned in the book, including "*Amazing Grace*" and "*One More River to Cross*." Then choose one song to share with the class. Explain where the song was played in the book and how it fits the context.
4. Find out who Joe Louis was and why he was important. Share your findings in a brief report.
5. Mr. Rodriguez comes from Mayaguez, Puerto Rico. Locate this town on a map and describe its climate, geographic features, and history.

**Science/Math**

1. Create a weekly grocery order that a family of four might buy from Mr. Rodriguez's bodega. Calculate how much their food would cost, based on current prices.
2. Find out the average salary for a young man of Billy Giles's age and experience. Then make a budget that Billy Giles and his wife could follow so that he could give up boxing and live on his salary alone.
3. Poli dies of a heart attack. Make a chart showing some of the things that men and women can do to help prevent heart attacks.
4. Jamie says that he doesn't believe in astrology. Define astrology and explain whether or not you believe in it.

**Alternate Assessment**

1. Explain ways in which people can overcome prejudice and learn to live together in harmony.
2. Walter Dean Myers grew up in Harlem. Read his autobiography *Bad Boy* and compare and contrast his experiences to those described in *145th Street*. Is the collection realistic?
3. Compose a scene in which Peaches returns to the neighborhood when she is all grown up.
4. Write a critical review of the collection for the school newspaper.



## Comprehension Test A

### Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)

Choose the term to complete each of the following statements. Place your answers in the blanks provided in the sentences.

1. (**Big Joe, Squeezie**) wants to enjoy his funeral party, so he organizes his own funeral while he is still alive to enjoy it.
2. Froggy Williams explains that Jamie is on a losing (**ridge, streak**).
3. The (**Lions, Tigros**), a gang, moves into the neighborhood.
4. Monkeyman brings (**his grandfather, a police officer**) and his godmother Sister Smith to the attack.
5. Eddie McCormick, called Mack, is a much-admired (**scholar, athlete**).
6. Mack loses (**a foot, an arm**) in an accident.
7. Mother Fletcher shows her thanks by (**baking cookies, knitting sweaters**).
8. Peaches has saved (**\$20, \$200**) to use to buy her mother a wedding gift.
9. J.T. is a (**teacher, hoodlum**) valiantly trying to help his mother.
10. The collection ends with a (**funeral, block party**).

### 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.

- |                         |                         |                            |                            |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>A. Jamie Farrell</b> | <b>D. Miss Pat</b>      | <b>G. Mother Fletcher</b>  | <b>I. Eddie McCormick,</b> |
| <b>B. Billy Gilles</b>  | <b>E. Doll</b>          | <b>H. Angela Luz Colon</b> | <b>called "Mack"</b>       |
| <b>C. O'Brien</b>       | <b>F. Mr. Rodriguez</b> |                            | <b>J. Peaches</b>          |

- \_\_\_ 1. The woman who gives money to Big Time
- \_\_\_ 2. The teenager who falls in love with Kitty
- \_\_\_ 3. An elderly and much respected black woman in Harlem
- \_\_\_ 4. A slave who kills her children rather than let them to sold
- \_\_\_ 5. The basketball player who wants to go to the dance with Celia
- \_\_\_ 6. The teenager who resents that her mother and Big Joe are in love
- \_\_\_ 7. The girl who finds it difficult to recover when her father is killed in his taxi
- \_\_\_ 8. A boxer
- \_\_\_ 9. The man who owns the local bodega, a small store
- \_\_\_ 10. The police office who calls an ambulance for Mother Fletcher

## 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. Big Joe is very popular in the neighborhood not only because he is good-natured but also because he is generous and helpful to one and all.
- \_\_\_ 2. Willie gets killed when the police fire into his deli in *"The Baddest Dog in Harlem."*
- \_\_\_ 3. The police officers shoot the dog in *"The Baddest Dog in Harlem"* because it attacked them.
- \_\_\_ 4. Twelve-year-old Peaches has upsetting dreams that seem to predict the future for an unlucky few.
- \_\_\_ 5. Monkeyman, a quiet and bookish lad, saves Peaches from a razor slashing by a female gang member.
- \_\_\_ 6. Monkeyman is badly beaten by gang members but his quiet, courageous stand against the gang earns him much respect.
- \_\_\_ 7. Big Time Henson senses his drug addiction drawing him closer and closer to an early grave.
- \_\_\_ 8. Big Time finds himself trapped on the roof with a child named Benny.
- \_\_\_ 9. Big Time is a mature, capable adult, a role model for others in the community.
- \_\_\_ 10. Peaches has saved a lot of money to buy her mother a wedding gift, but the money is stolen from her.

### Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences on the essay response page.

- 1. Argue that Kitty should or should not have dropped out of school. Include her reason.
- 2. Explain how these stories all fit together into a novel. Include at least two reasons.
- 3. Choose the story you like the best and describe why it appeals to you. Include specific examples and details from the story.
- 4. Explain what Monkeyman represents in the collection.

## Comprehension Test B

### Part I: True/False (20 points)

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

- \_\_\_ 1. Big Joe's funeral is interrupted by a drug bust, but it is a false alarm: the police have the wrong coffin.
- \_\_\_ 2. In "The Baddest Dog in Harlem," Mary is killed when the police open fire.
- \_\_\_ 3. The "baddest dog" in Harlem is a drug dealer named Big Time.
- \_\_\_ 4. Billy Giles, a boxer, promises to bring his wife Johnnie Mae some ice cream after the boxing match.
- \_\_\_ 5. Angela dreams that Poli, the old man who worked in Mr. Rodriguez's bodega, will die—and he does, of a heart attack.
- \_\_\_ 6. Angela's dreams eventually stop, but people do not lose their fear of her.
- \_\_\_ 7. Fast-talking Jamie Farrell, a smooth basketball player, has a terrible streak of bad luck.
- \_\_\_ 8. The Dudes, a gang, moves into their neighborhood
- \_\_\_ 9. Kitty expresses her love for Mack in a poem that she reads in English class.
- \_\_\_ 10. Big Joe finds himself trapped on the roof with a child named Peaches, but he saves her life.

### 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.

- |   |                     |
|---|---------------------|
| ___ 1. The slave who kills her children                   | A. Manny            |
| ___ 2. A handsome athlete                                 | B. Big Joe          |
| ___ 3. Jamie Farrell's best friend                        | C. Doll             |
| ___ 4. An elderly, much respected woman                   | D. Danny Vega       |
| ___ 5. The boxer who beats Billy Giles                    | E. Angela Luz Colon |
| ___ 6. Billy Giles' manager                               | F. Mr. Rodriguez    |
| ___ 7. The bodega owner                                   | G. "Mack"           |
| ___ 8. Squeezie's best friend                             | H. Mother Fletcher  |
| ___ 9. The man who marries Peaches's mother               | I. Peaches          |
| ___ 10. The girl who has visions after her father's death | J. Froggy Williams  |

## Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

### Part III: Motivation (20 points)

Complete each statement below with a reason or explanation.

1. Big Joe stages his own funeral even though he is not dead because
2. The narrator in "*The Baddest Dog in Harlem*" is upset at the end of the story because
3. Billy keeps boxing because
4. Billy's wife encouraged him to go to school, but he does not return to school because
5. Mrs. Flores forbids Angela to look at her because
6. Jamie wants to ask out Celia Evora because
7. The gang goes after Monkeyman because
8. Mack falls into a depression because
9. Kitty drops out of school because
10. Mrs. O'Brien insists that the family has Christmas dinner with Mother Fletcher because

### Part IV: Essay (40 points)

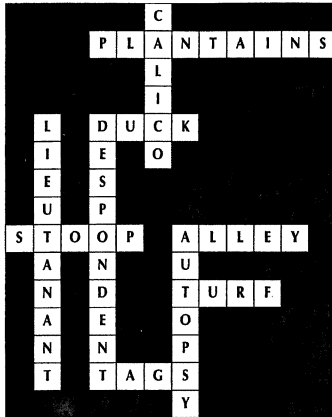
Choose two and answer in complete sentences on the essay response page.

1. Explain what Big Joe represents in the novel.
2. Analyze what the title means and tell why it fits the novel's theme.
3. Describe the novel's setting and explain its importance to the story.
4. Argue that Monkeyman should or should not have fought the gang.



# Answer Key

## Vocabulary



## COMPREHENSION TEST A

### Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)

- |                    |                      |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Big Joe         | 6. a foot            |
| 2. streak          | 7. knitting sweaters |
| 3. Tigros          | 8. \$200             |
| 4. his grandfather | 9. hoodlum           |
| 5. athlete         | 10. block party      |

### Part II: Matching (20 points)

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

### Part III: True/False (20 points)

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

### Part IV: Essay (40 Points)

Answers will vary.

## Comprehension Test B

### Part I: True and False (20 Points)

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

### Part II: Matching (20 Points)

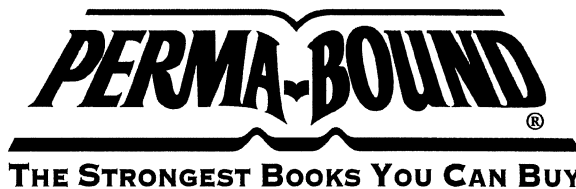
- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. C | 6. A  |
| 2. G | 7. F  |
| 3. J | 8. I  |
| 4. H | 9. B  |
| 5. D | 10. E |

### Part III: Motivation (20 points)

- he wants to be able to enjoy the fun
- a small child has been killed
- he wants the money so he can buy things for his wife and child
- a counselor told him that he was wasting his time
- she is terrified that Angela will cause her to die
- she is beautiful, "the finest chick in the school."
- he saves Peaches from a razor slashing by a female Tigros
- he loses his foot in an accident
- she wants to help Mack recover and build a new life
- her husband Officer O'Brien promised Mother Fletcher they would come; it is the right thing to do

### Part IV: Essay (40 Points)

Answers will vary.



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