



The Crossover

Kwame Alexander

Teacher's Guide

Written by Laurie Rozakis, Ph.D.



CLASSROOM
FAVORITES

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Synopsis

Warm-Up

Twelve-year old Josh Bell (nicknamed "Filthy McNasty" after a jazz musician) and his identical twin brother Jordan (nicknamed "JB") are superb basketball players. This is not surprising, since their father, Chuck Bell (nicknamed "Da Man"), is a former professional basketball player, now a stay-at-home dad. The twins' mother, Dr. Crystal Stanley-Bell, is the assistant principal at Reggie Lewis Junior High, the school the twins attend. The twins do not know why their father retired from basketball early, although their mother is very concerned about his health and cautions him to avoid salt and junk food. The novel is narrated by Josh.

First Quarter

Although identical twins, Josh and Jordan are easily distinguished from each other because Josh has dreadlocks and Jordan does not. Jordan and Josh bet on an upcoming basketball game: if Jordan gets the ball, he gets to cut off one of Josh's dreadlocks. If Josh gets the ball, Jordan has to moon the sixth-graders during lunch. Josh loses the bet, but Jordan accidentally cuts off five of his dreadlocks rather than one, leaving a huge bald spot and upsetting Josh very much. He goes to the barber shop to have the rest of his hair cut off.

The boys rummage in their parents' closet to find out why their father retired early. They find articles about Chuck's brilliant performance at the Olympic finals, his multi-year contract with the European basketball league, and his championship ring. Snooping further, they find a letter from the Los Angeles Lakers inviting Chuck for a

try-out, but note that his decision not to have surgery for "patella tendonitis" means that he may not be able to play again. The twins are baffled. At night, they hear their parents arguing about Chuck's hypertension and his refusal to see a doctor, even though his father died of a stroke, caused by hypertension, when he was young.

Chuck continues to sneak out for donuts and other unhealthy food.

Second Quarter

The twins' relationship suffers when Jordan begins dating a girl named Alexis, referred to as "Miss Sweet Tea." However, Josh takes the blame when Jordan passes him a note to give to Miss Sweet Tea and the teacher catches him. The assistant principal—the twins' mother—reminds Josh that Duke, the college he wishes to attend, won't accept cheaters so he should instead consider joining the military. Since the Bell family is strongly education-oriented, this is a stern rebuke.

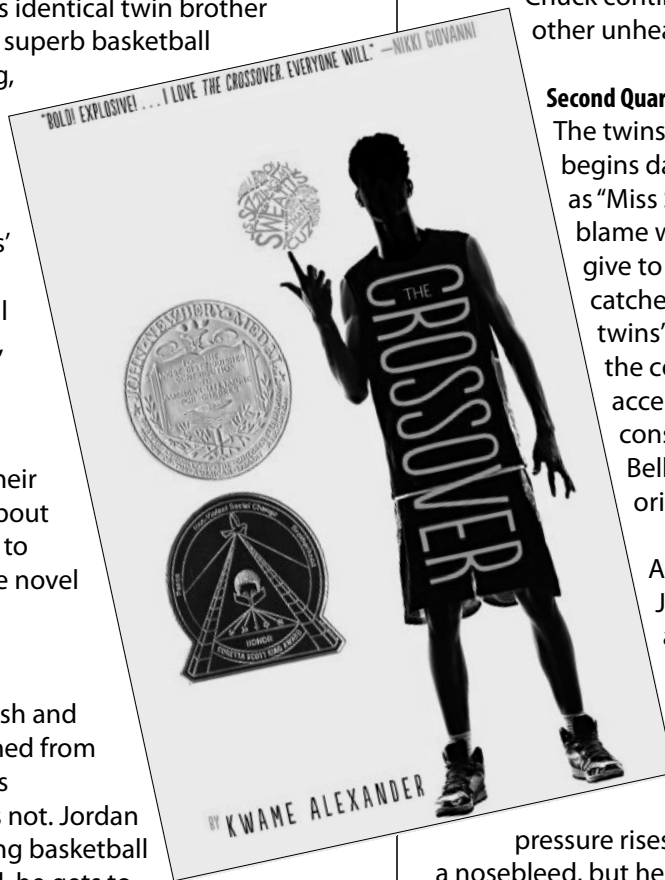
A rift occurs between the twins when Josh shoots the ball at Jordan during a game, slamming him in the nose.

Third Quarter

Josh is suspended from the team and Jordan refuses to accept his apology. Meanwhile, Chuck's blood pressure rises so high during a game that he gets a nosebleed, but he still refuses to see his physician. Josh is selected Junior High MVP and slowly, he and Jordan begin to reconcile.

Fourth Quarter

Tragically, Mrs. Bell's fears for her husband's health are proven valid when Chuck has a heart attack and falls into a coma, awakening on Christmas Eve. In the hospital, Josh and his father talk and Chuck insists that Josh play in the upcoming county championship game. Chuck dies of a heart attack during the game. He was thirty-nine years old.



Overtime

The obituary is written; the funeral is held. Josh had idolized his father and takes his death hard. Jordan slips Chuck's championship ring on Josh's finger, and the brothers reconcile. Jordan tells his brother, "I guess you Da Man now."

Timeline

- 1891** James Naismith invents "basket ball"
- 1896** The first professional basketball game is played
- 1921** The spelling of "basket ball" becomes "basketball"
- 1936** Basketball becomes an official Olympic sport
- 1938** The National Invitation Tournament is created
- 1939** The first NCAA Men's Division Basketball Championships are held
- 1940** Basketball games are first televised
- 1949** The National Basketball Association (NBA) is formed
- 1967** The American Basketball Association (ABA) is formed
- 1996** The Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) is formed
- 2014** *The Crossover* is published

Author Sketch

Called "truly a renaissance man" by poet Nikki Giovanni, Kwame Alexander is a publisher, speaker, and teacher as well as a celebrated, award-winning writer. Giovanni no doubt admires Alexander's skill in a wide range of genres—poetry, drama, and prose—and his appeal to adults as well as children and teens.

Alexander prefers not to reveal specific details about his life, including his age and information about his childhood, but he states on his website that he started writing when he was twelve years old. He wrote: "It was a mother's day poem for my, uh, mother, and it was horrible, but she liked it a lot. I decided I wanted to be a poet when I wrote a poem for a girl I liked in college. Later, she married me. Yay for poets." Alexander attended Virginia Tech, and stayed in Virginia, currently residing in Reston.

Alexander frequently speaks at schools, libraries, and literary conferences and has written for television and the stage. In addition, he offers workshops for aspiring writers and produces book festivals, including the Capital BookFest, underwritten by the *Washington Post*.

Explaining his impetus for writing *The Crossover*, Alexander said, "I simply wanted to write a good story about sports, family, friendship, and that first crush, all things that were important to me when I was twelve." He is currently writing a prequel to *The Crossover* and a book of "Basketball Rules for Life."

Critic's Corner

Kwame Alexander is a poet, teacher, and bestselling author of more than twenty books. *The Crossover* received the highest award for young adult literature, the Newbery Award, in 2015. In addition, the novel won the Coretta Scott King Author Award Honor, the NCTE Charlotte Huck Honor, the Lee Bennett Hopkins Poetry Award, and the Passaic Poetry Prize.

Reviewing *The Crossover* in *School Library Journal*, critic Kiera Parrott said: "Alexander has crafted a story that vibrates with energy and heart and begs to be read aloud. A slam dunk." The *Booklist* critic, Gail Bush, was similarly impressed, saying: "An accomplished author and poet, Alexander eloquently mashes up concrete poetry, hip-hop, a love of jazz, and a thriving family bond. The effect is poetry in motion. It is a rare verse novel that is fundamentally poetic rather than using this writing trend as a device."

Selected Other Works

Novels

- Booked* (2016)
- He Said, She Said: A Novel* (2013)
- Acoustic Rooster and His Barnyard Band* (2011)
- Indigo Blume and the Garden City* (2010)
- Do The Write Thing: 7 Steps to Publishing Success* (2002)
- Do The Write Thing Journal for Writers* (2002)
- Tough Love: Cultural Criticism and Familial Observations on the Life and Death of Tupac Shakur*, ed. (1996)

Collections and Poems

- The Book Party* (2016)
- An American Poem* (2008)
- And Then You Know: New and Selected Poems* (2008)
- Crush: Love Poems* (2007)
- Family Pictures: Poems and Photographs Celebrating Our Loved Ones*, ed. (2007)
- The Way I Walk: Short Stories and Poems for Young Adults*, ed. (2006)
- Dancing Naked on the Floor: Poems and Essays* (2005)
- Kupenda: Love Poems* (2000)
- 360°: A Revolution of Black Poets*, ed. (1998)

Just Us: Poems & Counterpoems, 1986-1995 (1995)
The Flow: New Black Poets in Motion, ed. (1994)

Bibliography

- “Kwame Alexander,”
<http://kwamealexander.com/index.php?Page=homepage>
- “The Crossover”
<http://www.amazon.com/Crossover- Kwame-Alexander/dp/0544107713>

General Objectives

1. To find examples of love
2. To understand the novel’s title
3. To appreciate the author’s style
4. To identify the novel’s symbols
5. To explore the family’s culture
6. To recognize the novel’s themes
7. To identify the ten “rules” of life
8. To assess each character’s personality
9. To evaluate the impact of sibling rivalry
10. To understand the importance of family

Specific Objectives

1. To analyze the importance of basketball in the novel
2. To compare and contrast Josh and Jordan’s characters
3. To analyze the effect of the novel’s unusual structure
4. To understand the different ways that love can be shown
5. To consider what Chuck’s championship ring symbolizes
6. To evaluate the impact of the author’s use of poetry, rhyme, and rap
7. To explore the Bells’ family structure, culture, and social standing
8. To probe the meaning of the ten poems about “rules”
9. To explore the significance of nicknames in the novel
10. To identify and analyze the different types of poems in the novel: epistolary, list, tanka, free verse, tercet, etc.

Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Kwame Alexander’s style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

Structure is the organization of information in a literary work. Alexander structures *The Crossover* like a

basketball game, with the following sections: Warm-Up, First Quarter, Second Quarter, Third Quarter, Fourth Quarter, Overtime. Each section roughly corresponds to part of the traditional plot structure: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution. The structure, then, serves to reinforce the novel’s plot, subject, and theme.

Typography is the art of arranging type to make a document readable, attractive, and meaningful. Alexander uses typography to make his poems effective, including words written in all capitals, an unconventional mix of lower case and capital letters (“MYTHical MANchild”), italics, and boldface. Further, the words are arranged on the page to create and reinforce meaning and rhythm.

Point of view is the vantage point from which the events are related. Alexander uses the first-person point of view, telling the story through Josh’s eyes. This point of view gives the novel a sense of immediacy and helps the audience relate to the main character and his situation.

The Importance of Setting

The setting of *The Crossover* is primarily the Bell family home, the boys’ school, and the basketball court, emphasizing that this is a story about learning and growing in life, both on and off the court. The ordinary settings underscore the universality of the book’s themes. During the course of the story, the main characters, Josh and Jordan, learn key lessons about life and love, and especially about the meaning and importance of family.

Cross-Curricular Sources

Novels

- Sherman Alexie, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*
 Phil Bildner, *A Whole New Ballgame: A Rip and Red Book*
 Samantha Gudger, *A Game Worth Watching*
 Karen Kingsbury, *The Chance*
 Mike Lupica, *Fast Break*
 W.C. Mack, *Athlete Vs. Mathlete*
 Leah Rae Miller, *Romancing the Nerd*
 Catherine Gilbert Murdock, *Front and Center*
 Lincoln Peirce, *Game On!*
 Matthew Quick, *Boy2*

Nonfiction

- Jonathan Abrams, *Boys Among Men: How the Prep-to-Pro Generation Redefined the NBA and Sparked a Basketball Revolution*

Jay Bilas, *Toughness: Developing True Strength On and Off the Court*

Larry Bird, et.al. *When the Game Was Ours*

John Feinstein, *The Legends Club: Dean Smith, Mike Krzyzewski,*

Jim Valvano, *and an Epic College Basketball Rivalry*

Jack McCallum, *The Dream Team: How Michael, Magic, Larry, Charles and the Greatest Team of All Time Conquered the World and Changed the Game of Basketball Forever*

Jalen Rose, *Got to Give the People What They Want: True Stories and Flagrant Opinions from Center Court*

Bill Simmons, *The Book of Basketball: The NBA According to the Sports Guy*

Pat Summit, *Sum It Up: 1,098 Victories, a Couple of Irrelevant Losses, and a Life in Perspective*

DVD/Video

The Basketball Diaries

Coach Carter

Cornbread, Earl, and Me

The 6th Man

Fast Break

The Pistol: The Birth of a Legend

The Fish That Saved Pittsburgh

Teen Wolf

Sunset Park

Finding Forrester

Online

<http://www.nba.com/>

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Kwame Alexander's *The Crossover* should include these aspects:

Themes

- basketball
- death
- community
- family
- identity
- love
- sacrifice
- sibling rivalry
- striving
- romance

Motifs

- finding you identity through sports, especially basketball
- the importance of taking care of your health
- belonging to a strong-knit community
- appreciating your family and its positive values
- finding your own identity, especially as a twin
- dealing with the untimely death of a loved one
- experiencing growth and change
- falling in love for the first time
- striving for success
- working hard at your studies

Meaning Study

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

1. –I knew/one day/I'd need/my own wings/to fly. (p. 15)
(In the poem "Five Reasons I Have Locks," Josh lists people whose dreadlocks have inspired him, including the rappers Lil Wayne, 2 Chainz, and Wale. Josh then explains that he adopted the hairstyle because his father wore it when he appeared on ESPN's "Best Dunks Ever." Despite his deep admiration for his father and the fact that he has patterned himself on him, Josh realizes that he must be an individual and establish his own unique identity.)
2. In this game of life/your family is the court/and the ball is your heart. (p. 20)
(This is the first of the "Basketball Rules of Life" in the novel, arguably the most important one because of its message: participate fully in all your endeavors, especially when they relate to the family, your base.)
3. That boy is special, but it doesn't hurt/that Chuck "Da Bell" is his father. (p. 27)
(Josh is a very talented basketball player, and his father, Chuck, was a professional. Since Josh idolizes his father and loves him deeply, basketball is central to Josh's life and the family's dynamics.)
4. A simple basketball move/in which a player dribbles/the ball quickly/from one hand/to the other. (p. 29)
(In this poem, Josh defines the "crossover" move. Its importance lies in the fact that it allows the player to open a clear path to the basket to score. Symbolically, Josh and the entire the Bell family must do a crossover—switch their focus—from Chuck to Crystal when Chuck dies.)

5. Your decision not to have surgery/means that realistically, /with patella tendonitis, /you may not be able to play/again. (p. 47)
(Jordan and Josh find a letter from the L.A. Lakers to Chuck, inviting him to the free-agent tryouts. Why Chuck never had the surgery he needed is not explained in the novel, but his reluctance to visit doctors and take care of his health is the tragedy in the novel, as it results in his premature death.)
6. Then I asked him if a deaf person/could write music. And he said, "Huh?" then/he took out a wrench and told me, "I'm gonna lower the goal for y'all." (p. 64)
(Chuck once again tells his sons his favorite story, which involves teaching them how to play basketball. They were only three years old when Chuck took them to the park to shoot free throws. The man who worked there mocked Chuck and his toddlers, but when Chuck brought up Beethoven—the deaf person who wrote music—the man lowered the net. The anecdote shows the importance of making allowances and giving people chances to succeed.)
7. She's in and out/handling principal stuff... p. 82)
(The Bells are upper-middle class, well-educated strivers. The twins' mother has her doctorate; that the twins will attend college, and top colleges, is taken for granted. Both boys study hard and are as proud of their academic success as they are of their athletic prowess. The novel thus presents strong, positive role models for black teenagers.)
8. When/you stop/playing/your game/you've already/lost (p. 93)
(Basketball Rule #5 shows the importance of perseverance and hard work, the hallmarks of the Bell family.)
9. Because he's always drinking Sweet Tea./Because sometimes I get thirsty... (p. 204)
(In this list poem, Josh explains to his mother why he is so angry and why he hurt his brother. On one level, his reasons are typically adolescent, a desire for a girlfriend; but on another, they are terrifyingly prescient, as his father's heart attack will indeed lead to his death.)
10. I guess you Da Man now, Filthy, J.B. says. (p. 236)
(After their father dies, Jordan gives Chuck's championship ring to Josh, acknowledging that the mantle of basketball greatness has passed to him. This marks Josh's maturity and the healing of the rift between the twins.)

Comprehension Study

Questions 1-5 (Literal Level)

1. What is the format of this novel?

(The novel is written in verse rather than in prose, using different types of poems, including free verse, unrhymed couplets, epistolary [letter] poems, list poems, and a tercet.)

2. What is Josh's relationship with his father?
(Josh admires his father greatly, to the point of idolizing him. Josh considers his father the backbone of the family.)
3. Who is Miss Sweet Tea?
(She is Jordan's girlfriend, Alexis, a pretty teenager who is the twins' classmate.)
4. What causes Chuck's death?
(He dies of a heart attack caused by untreated hypertension—high blood pressure.)
5. What does Jordan give Josh at the end of the novel and why?
(Jordan gives Josh their father's championship basketball ring to acknowledge that Josh is the heir to their father's talent.)

Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)

6. What is the significance of nicknames in the novel?
(The nicknames underscore specific character traits. For example, Chuck is called "Da Man" for his outstanding skill on the basketball court; Josh is "Filthy McNasty" after a jazz musician, showing that Josh is cool.)
7. What do readers learn from the ten basketball rules in the novel?
(The rules provide a guide to adult conduct, on and off the court. They instruct readers how to live with honesty, integrity, and kindness.)
8. Why does Josh hit his brother in the face with the basketball?
(Josh is supposed to pass the ball to his brother, but instead, he shoots it at him, hitting Jordan in his face and bloodying his nose. The act shows how upset Josh is that Jordan has a girlfriend and so is paying him less attention and even mocking him. Josh is also upset that his father refuses to seek medical care, endangering his health.)

Questions 9-10 (Critical Level)

9. What different meanings does the title have?
(The term "crossover" refers to a basketball play. It also refers to Josh crossing over from childhood to maturity, and his father, Chuck, crossing over from life to death.)
10. Why doesn't Chuck have the surgery to correct his patella tendonitis?
(The novel never provides a reason, but it appears that Chuck feels he is immortal, as shown by his refusal to

treat his hypertension. He may also be afraid of doctors and does not want to have any restrictions imposed on him.)

Questions 11-12 (Creative Level)

11. Rewrite one poem in the novel in prose.
12. Working with a group of classmates, explain how the twins are similar and different. Include elements of their personality, appearance, and behavior.

Across the Curriculum

Art/Music

1. On his website, Alexander wrote: "When I was writing *The Crossover*, I was sitting in Panera Bread and listening to jazz music on Pandora, and this song came on and I really liked it and I looked at the name of it, and it was called 'Filthy McNasty' and I thought 'This would be a grand nickname for one of my characters.'" Find another reference from a song that you think fits Josh. Explain your choice.
2. Write and deliver a rap song that summarizes the novel.
3. Research one of the jazz greats mentioned in the novel, such as Horace Silver. Play one of his songs for the class, explaining its technique and appeal.
4. Design a championship ring for a sport of your choice.
5. Dr. Bell sings "Kumbaya" to her husband in the hospital. Sing the song with a small group of classmates.

History/Social Studies

1. Josh wants to attend Duke University. Identify and research three colleges you would like to attend. Decide which one is the best match for you and explain why.
2. Write the rules of basketball and then play an exhibition match with your classmates.
3. The novel touches on contemporary issues involving race, most notably when Chuck is pulled over on the way to the game. Make a collage showing examples of similar racial situations in America today.
4. Dr. Bell threatens Josh with enlistment in the Air Force or Marines rather than attending college. Trace the history of one branch of the armed forces.
5. Write a newspaper article about the first professional basketball game, held in 1896.

Language Arts

1. Josh likes to read, greatly encouraged by his mother. List ten books that you believe every junior high student should read.

2. Write the note that Jordan sends to Miss Sweet Tea, the one at the center of the poem "How Do You Spell Trouble?"
3. Research the poems of e. e. cummings and choose one to explicate for the class, explaining the qualities it shares with a similar poem from *The Crossover*.
4. Kwame Alexander creates new words such as *slammerific* and *dunkalicious*. Create ten new words and define each one, including a pronunciation guide.
5. The word "principal" is often confused with "principle." Make a chart showing at least 10 pairs of words that are often confused, such as weigh/way, in/inn, fair/fare.

Mathematics

1. Josh says that he's no "Pythagoras." Who was Pythagoras and why is he important? Explain his mathematical innovations to the class.
2. Explain the method of scoring in basketball.
3. Basketball, baseball, and football are popular in America. What are the ten most popular sports in the world? Make a chart comparing the popularity of different sports across the globe. Which sport is the most popular?
4. How much money does a pro basketball player make? Show your findings in a graph, identifying high, low, and median salaries.
5. Make a chart showing how often identical and fraternal twins are born.

Science

1. Create a menu for a healthy, delicious Thanksgiving meal for the Bell family, taking Chuck's dietary restrictions into account.
2. Make crêpes suzettes, mentioned on p. 4 of the novel. Share them with the class.
3. Learn more about patella tendonitis and its treatments.
4. Explain the causes and effects of high blood pressure.
5. Miss Sweet Tea argues that Vermont has the best tomatoes. Are tomatoes a fruit or a vegetable? Find out.

Speech/Drama

1. Research and report on one of the basketball players mentioned in the novel, such as Kevin Durant and Chris Paul, explaining their importance to the game.
2. Chuck loves bad jokes, such as the one on p. 42 about a cheetah. Write and deliver a comedy routine for the class.
3. With a small group, debate whether or not Josh's punishment for slamming the ball into his brother's face was fair.

4. Write and deliver a eulogy that Jordan or Josh would present at their father's funeral. Keep in mind how much they revere their father.
5. Role-play a scene between the twins in which Josh apologizes to Jordan. You may wish to consult the letter "Dear Jordan."

Student Involvement Activities

1. Dr. Bell serves hummus to her family. Make some hummus to share with your classmates and explain its ingredients and nutritional value.
2. Create a diorama of the team playing basketball.
3. Are strokes really hereditary? Find out and share your findings in an oral report.
4. Restage a key scene from the novel as a radio play.
5. Create a mural that shows the novel's main events.

Alternative Assessment

1. Write a poem about how Josh changes in the novel, modeling your work on one of the novel's poems.
2. Find several YouTube videos of Kwame Alexander. What new information did you glean about him?
3. Write a critical review of the novel and post it on the class web page or blog, if possible.
4. Explain when the term "crossover" changes from being a basketball term to expressing the novel's theme.

Vocabulary Test

Match each word to its meaning. Write the letter of your choice in the space provided.

- | | | |
|-------|------------------|-----------------------------|
| _____ | 1. calamity | A. alienated |
| _____ | 2. snicker | B. exult |
| _____ | 3. crimson | C. celebrated |
| _____ | 4. dubious | D. high blood pressure |
| _____ | 5. gloat | E. disaster |
| _____ | 6. acclaimed | F. family treasure |
| _____ | 7. opulent | G. red |
| _____ | 8. atone | H. storm |
| _____ | 9. squall | I. mock |
| _____ | 10. distinction | J. reversal of expectations |
| _____ | 11. Heirloom | K. lavish |
| _____ | 12. estranged | L. doubtful |
| _____ | 13. ironic | M. fame |
| _____ | 14. churlish | N. apologize |
| _____ | 15. hypertension | O. truculent and impolite |

Comprehension Test A

Part I: 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 blanks provided at left.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| _____ 1. Vondie Little | A. reads from <i>The Art of War</i> |
| _____ 2. Jordan Bell | B. assistant principal at Reggie Lewis Junior High |
| _____ 3. Josh Bell | C. the University that Josh would like to attend |
| _____ 4. Chuck Bell | D. a friend of Josh's whose mother works for NASA |
| _____ 5. Dr. Crystal Stanley-Bell | E. Miss Sweet Tea |
| _____ 6. Alexis | F. a famous jazz musician |
| _____ 7. The Red Rockets | G. falls in love with Alexis |
| _____ 8. Coach | H. dies of a heart attack |
| _____ 9. Horace Silver | I. defending country champions |
| _____ 10. Duke | J. nicknamed "Filthy McNasty" |

Part II: Sentence Completion (20 Points)

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

1. Josh got his nickname from _____
2. Chuck used to work as a (n) _____
3. Dr. Bell doesn't want her family to eat out because _____
4. One day, Josh and Jordan go into their parents' closet to _____
5. In class, Josh takes the blame for passing the note because _____
6. One night, Josh is late to a game because _____
7. Josh slams the ball into his brother's face during a game because _____
8. Chuck collapses during one of the boys' basketball games because _____
9. Chuck dies from _____
10. Jordan gives Josh their father's ring to show that _____

Part III: True/False (20 Points)

Mark the following statements either **T** for true or **F** for false.

- _____ 1. When he was young, Josh did not like his nickname because kids made fun of it, but as he got older, he grew to like it.
- _____ 2. Jordan cuts off all of Josh's dreadlocks when the brothers have a terrible argument.
- _____ 3. The twins are almost thirteen years old when the novel opens.
- _____ 4. Chuck Bell's career ended when the surgery he had on his knee was not a success.
- _____ 5. Chuck is vigilant about going to the doctor and taking care of his health.
- _____ 6. People said that Grandpa died after a fall, but the truth is that he had a stroke.
- _____ 7. Josh slams the basketball into his brother's face rather than passing it.
- _____ 8. Chuck is offered a coaching job at a nearby college, which he eagerly accepts because the family needs the money badly.
- _____ 9. At the end of the novel, the twins reconcile and are once again close.
- _____ 10. Josh refuses to play in the championship game because his father cannot be there to see him.

Part IV: Essay (40 Points)

Choose two of the following prompts and answer in a paragraph.

1. Explain the different meanings of the novel's title, *The Crossover*.
2. *The Crossover* is told in verse, not prose. Analyze the effectiveness of the novel's form.
3. Compare and contrast Josh and Jordan, showing how they are similar and different.
4. A critic wrote, "The biggest surprise of *The Crossover* is that, for all the bells and whistles of a young man's game, it is most boldly and certainly a book about tenderness." Agree or disagree with this assessment.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Underline the word or phrase that completes each of the following statements correctly.

1. Josh's nickname "Filthy McNasty" came from (**a jazz song, the messy way he ate as a child**).
2. Chuck's nickname is ("**Da Wiz,**" "**Da Man**") for his skill on the basketball court.
3. Chuck suffers from (**diabetes, high blood pressure**), which worries his wife very much.
4. Dr. Bell works as a(n) (**assistant principal, dentist**) and is well respected.
5. At Thanksgiving, the family ate nothing but (**Italian take-out, salad**) and everyone laughed about it.
6. Josh gets into trouble in the classroom when he is caught (**cheating on a test, passing a note**).
7. Josh slams the basketball into the face of his (**brother, coach**) because he is so angry.
8. For his foul, Josh is (**suspended from the team, made to do community service**).
9. Chuck Bell dies from (**injuries sustained in a car accident, a heart attack**).
10. After their father's death, Jordan gives Josh their father's (**championship ring, gold watch**).

Part II: Identification (20 points)

Briefly describe each of the following items and explain why it is important to the novel.

1. Josh's dreadlocks

2. basketball

3. poetry

4. nicknames

5. Food

Part III: Motivation (20 Points)

Complete each phrase with a reason or justification.

1. JB idolizes Michael Jordan because _____
2. Chuck gives his sons rules about life to _____
3. Dr. Bell tries to control her husband's diet because _____
4. One day, Josh and Jordan go into their parents' closet to _____
5. Josh gets angry at Jordan because _____
6. Chuck refuses to call Dr. Youngblood because _____
7. The class applauds Josh because _____
8. Dr. Bell does not want her husband to take a job as a basketball coach because _____
9. The twins' parents suddenly leave the basketball game because _____
10. The coach visits the boys at home near the end of the novel because _____

Part IV: Essay (40 Points)

Choose two of the following prompts and answer in a paragraph.

1. Explain why *The Crossover* won the Newbery medal, the highest award in young adult literature.
2. Analyze the dual meanings the word "crossover" has in the novel and how it comes to express the theme.
3. Trace the novel's plot, including at least four major events.
4. Describe why the author includes vocabulary words highlighted, with a pronunciation key.

Answer Key

Vocabulary Test

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. E | 6. C | 11. F |
| 2. I | 7. K | 12. A |
| 3. G | 8. N | 13. J |
| 4. L | 9. H | 14. O |
| 5. B | 10. M | 15. D |

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Matching (20 Points)

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

Part II: Sentence Completion (20 Points)

1. a jazz song that his father liked
2. professional basketball player
3. she is trying to control what her husband eats to keep him healthy
4. find out why their father retired from basketball early in his career
5. he loves his brother and doesn't want him to get in trouble
6. a police officer pulled over his father in an instance of racial profiling
7. he is very angry at his brother for growing away from him
8. he has a heart attack
9. a second massive heart attack
10. Josh will be the one to carry on his father's skill on the court and his love of the game

Part III: True/False (20 Points)

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

Part IV: Essay (40 Points)

Answers will vary.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

1. a jazz song
2. "Da Man"
3. high blood pressure
4. assistant principal
5. salad
6. passing a note
7. brother
8. suspended from the team
9. heart attack
10. championship ring

Part II: Identification (20 points)

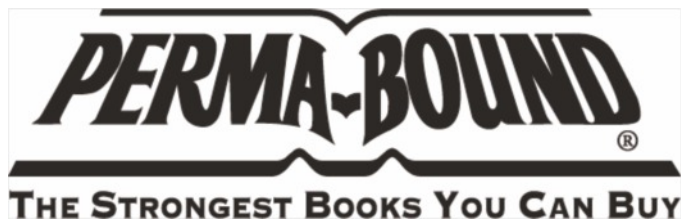
1. When his brother Jordan accidentally cuts off five of his dreadlocks rather than the one they had agreed upon, Josh feels like he has lost a key part of his identity.
2. Basketball is the novel's controlling metaphor, directing the narrative and helping to unify the family. The game defines Chuck Bell's identity, and he has passed his love of the game to his sons.
3. *The Crossover* is written in poetry, not prose, capturing the rhythms of a basketball game, first love, sibling rivalry, and deep loss.
4. Nicknames underscore specific character traits. For example, Chuck is called "Da Man" for his outstanding skill on the basketball court; Josh is "Filthy McNasty" after a jazz musician because Josh is so cool.
5. Food is an issue in the novel because Dr. Bell wants her husband to eat a low salt, low fat diet to control his hypertension. She cooks healthful meals and restricts the family to eating out rarely, but Chuck defies her by eating Krispie Kreme donuts and other foods that raise his blood pressure. His poor diet likely contributes to his early death.

Part III: Motivation (20 Points)

1. Jordan is such an outstanding basketball player and athlete.
2. teach them the proper way to live, so they grow up to be honest, hard-working, and kind.
3. he has high blood pressure and should not eat too much salt or fatty food.
4. find out why their father left professional basketball early.
5. Jordan falls in love with Alexis, Miss Sweet Tea, and Josh feels left out.
6. he does not want to see the doctor, and he refuses to take care of his health.
7. he is selected the Junior High MVP by the *Daily News*.
8. she worries that the stress will be too much for him and his health will suffer.
9. Chuck isn't feeling well.
10. he is trying to heal the rift between the twins.

Part IV: Essay (40 Points)

Answers will vary.



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