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Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Scorpions

by Walter Dean Myers

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Scorpions

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, students will be able to:

1. discuss the roles that power and powerlessness play in *Scorpions*.
2. discuss the ways in which pressure to “be a man” affects Jamal and his decision-making ability.
3. define foreshadowing, narrative, plot, point of view, simile, realism, and protagonist, and find examples of each in *Scorpions*.
4. write detailed character sketches of Jamal and Tito, including information on how each suffers a loss of innocence over the course of the novel.
5. discuss Myers’ use of slang and informal dialogue and what it adds to *Scorpions*.
6. identify the ways in which Principal Davidson and Jamal’s teachers fail Jamal, and discuss whether or not a school’s staff has the right to determine that a child should be on medication or sent to a school for “problem kids.”
7. discuss the significance of having Tito, the most peace-loving and gentle character in the book, end up shooting someone.
8. discuss what we learn about Jamel’s character through his friendship with Tito and his job at Mr. Gonzalez’s store.
9. discuss the power dynamics within the Scorpions and what function (aside from providing drug runners) the gang seems to serve.
10. discuss the ways in which Sassy is both like and unlike an average 8-year-old girl and what her differences suggest about the environment in which she has grown up.
11. discuss the concepts of making generalizations and having preconceived notions as they apply to *Scorpions*, particularly in regards to race and age.
12. evaluate the choices Jamel makes throughout the novel and whether he had other options.
13. discuss the ending of the novel and what it may imply about Jamel’s future and the future of the neighborhood.

Scorpions

QUESTIONS FOR ESSAY AND DISCUSSION

1. Do you think that Jamal needs to be on medication or transferred to a school for “problem kids”? Back up your answer with details from the text.
2. What does Myers’ use of slang and informal dialogue add to the novel? How would the novel change if formal dialogue were used instead?
3. Describe the interaction, throughout the book, between Sassy, Mama, and Jamal. Is it predominately positive or negative? Support your answer with details from the text.
4. Why does Jamal keep all of his troubles to himself? How may things have turned out differently if Jamal had confided in someone?
5. In what ways does Principal Davidson fail Jamal?
6. In your opinion, does *Scorpions* end on an optimistic or a pessimistic note? What can we expect about Jamal’s future?
7. Discuss the power dynamics within the Scorpions. How does one win or lose power? How closely-knit is the gang?
8. Tito and Jamal each experience a loss of innocence. Describe how each is at the beginning of the novel, what happens to change them, and the result.
12. Discuss the concept of making generalizations as it applies to *Scorpions*. What generalizations do some characters make about Puerto Ricans? What generalizations do some make about African-Americans? What generalizations do some make about young people?
13. Discuss the ways in which Sassy is both like and unlike an average 8-year-old girl. What makes her different and how do you think she got that way?
14. Aside from providing drug runners, what function does the gang serve?

Note: All page references are from the First Harper Trophy edition of *Scorpions*, copyright 1990.

Scorpions

TEST

I. Multiple Choice

1. The narrator of this story is
 - A. the main character.
 - B. Jamal.
 - C. the all-knowing third person.
 - D. Sassy.
 - E. Both A and C

2. Jevon Hicks is
 - A. the main character.
 - B. Jamal's brother.
 - C. Abuela's son.
 - D. Jamal's father.
 - E. Jamal's best friend.

3. Mack uses "dust" as a slang term for
 - A. cocaine.
 - B. money.
 - C. crack.
 - D. the act of shooting someone.
 - E. the way cops treat black teenagers.

4. "Look how scared he look," is an example of
 - A. realistic dialogue.
 - B. imagery.
 - C. foreshadowing.
 - D. plot.
 - E. third person narration.

5. Jamal's mama listens to
 - A. rock and roll music.
 - B. pop music.
 - C. country music.
 - D. gospel music.
 - E. jazz music.

6. The original leader of the Scorpions is
 - A. Tito.
 - B. Mack.
 - C. Indian.
 - D. Angel.
 - E. Randy.

7. Randy is in prison for
 - A. robbery.
 - B. murder.
 - C. assault.
 - D. grand theft auto.
 - E. Both A and B

8. How much money is needed to get Randy out of prison?
 - A. \$500 to \$2000
 - B. \$200 to \$500
 - C. \$3000
 - D. \$5000
 - E. \$10,000

9. How old is Jamal?
 - A. He is thirteen.
 - B. He is twelve.
 - C. He is fifteen.
 - D. He is seventeen.
 - E. The book does not say.

10. Where is Jamal's father?
 - A. He is in jail.
 - B. He is dead.
 - C. He lives somewhere else.
 - D. He lives with Jamal.
 - E. He lives in Puerto Rico.

11. Who gives Jamal the gun?
 - A. Tito gives it to him.
 - B. He finds it in the trash.
 - C. His father gives it to him.
 - D. Randy leaves it behind for him.
 - E. Mack gives him the gun.

12. The Scorpions' clubhouse is
- A. an old firehouse.
 - B. an old police station.
 - C. an abandoned warehouse.
 - D. an empty apartment building.
 - E. in a basement.
13. How does Jamal take the gun to school?
- A. He sends it with Tito.
 - B. He puts it in his backpack.
 - C. He puts it inside a sneaker, in a paper bag.
 - D. He does not take the gun to school.
 - E. He hides the gun in the pocket of his jeans.
14. "The thin man put his hand on his back pocket and left it there. The teenager looked at him sullenly, then walked slowly on." (Pg. 36) The man in this passage pats his pocket to show the teenager he has a gun. This hints at future events in the book. What is this literary technique called?
- A. plot
 - B. foreshadowing
 - C. narrative
 - D. point of view
 - E. realism
15. Jamal's favorite activity is
- A. drawing.
 - B. writing.
 - C. playing with guns.
 - D. fighting.
 - E. school.

II. Matching

Match the following characters with their description or quote.

- A. Jamal
- B. Tito
- C. Dwayne
- D. Randy
- E. Mack

- _____ 16. “You just keep it in your head that that boy ain’t had no upbringing and don’t amount to two cents.” (Pg. 52)
- _____ 17. “The only way to deal with someone stupid like _____, Jamal thought, was to punch him out.” (Pg. 60)
- _____ 18. “That was how they had taken him away, with just his pants and one sneaker on.” (Pg. 118)
- _____ 19. “He was feeling small, the way he sometimes did. Small and weak.” (Pg. 146)
- _____ 20. “They said since I wasn’t so old, I could go to Puerto Rico and stay there with my father and then I wouldn’t be in trouble.” (Pg. 213)

III. Essays

1. Discuss the ways in which pressure to “be a man” affects Jamal and his decision-making ability.
2. Discuss the significance of having Tito, the most peace-loving and gentle character in the book, end up shooting someone.
3. Discuss the role that powerlessness—or a sense of powerlessness—plays in *Scorpions*.
4. Discuss what we learn about Jamal’s character through his friendship with Tito and his job at Mr. Gonzalez’s store.

Scorpions

ANSWER KEY

I. Multiple Choice

1. C
2. D
3. B
4. E
5. D

6. E
7. E
8. A
9. B
10. C

11. E
12. A
13. C
14. B
- 15. A**

II. Matching

16. E
17. C
18. D
19. A
20. B

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Terms and Definitions

Foreshadowing - the use of hints or clues in a story to suggest what action is to come.

Foreshadowing is frequently used to create interest and build suspense. **Example:** Two small and seemingly inconsequential car accidents predict and hint at the upcoming, important wreck in *The Great Gatsby*.

Narrator - the one who tells the story. The narrator must not be confused with “author,” the one who writes the story. If the narrator is a character in the book, the proper term is “first-person narration.” **Example:** *Moby Dick* is narrated by Ishmael, a crewmember. If the narrator is not a character in the book, the correct term is “third-person narration.”

Example: *Sense and Sensibility*.

Plot - the pattern of events in a literary work; what happens.

Point of View - the position or vantage point, determined by the author, from which the story seems to come to the reader. The two most common points of view are First-person and Third-person. **Examples:** First-person point of view occurs in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*; the reader receives all information through Huck’s eyes. An example of third-person point of view is Dickens’ *Hard Times*, in which the narrator is not a character in the book.

Protagonist - the central or main character in a story around whom the plot centers. **Examples:** Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter*; David Copperfield in *David Copperfield*.

Realism - a literary movement that has at its core the depiction of life as it really is, with no attempt to hide or gloss over the problems, hardships, or ugliness of life. **Example:** *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Simile - a comparison between two different things using either *like* or *as*. **Examples:** I am as hungry as a horse. The huge trees broke like twigs during the hurricane.

Scorpions

STUDY GUIDE TEACHER'S COPY

Chapter One

Vocabulary

appeal—new trial

1. From what point of view does the author tell this story?

Walter Dean Myers tells this story from the third person point of view, that of the all-knowing narrator.

2. Who is the protagonist in this story?

Twelve-year-old Jamal Hicks is the main character in this story.

3. What does Jamal see outside his window while waiting for his mother to come home? What does this tell the reader about Jamal and the neighborhood in which his family lives?

Jamal sees a drug addict leaning against a lamppost. This indicates to the reader that Jamal already knows what an addict looks like, and that he and his family live in a dangerous neighborhood.

4. Why are Jamal and his little sister Sassy home alone?

Their mother is visiting their brother Randy in prison.

5. How long is Randy supposed to remain in prison?

Randy has been sentenced to fifteen to twenty years in prison, and a lawyer says he has to stay in for at least seven years before he is eligible for parole.

6. Describe the style of the dialogue in this chapter. For example, is it formal or realistic?

The dialogue is realistic and makes use of slang.

Chapter Two

Vocabulary

addle—scatter; confuse

briskly—rapidly

1. In Chapter One, Jamal and Sassy have to save some dinner for their mother, even though Sassy is still hungry. In this chapter, we learn that Jamal sleeps on a pullout bed in the living room, and the family has been without hot water for two days. What is the author trying to convey with these bits of information?

Myers is creating a sense of deprivation and poverty.

2. What type of music does Jamal’s mother listen to?

She listens to gospel music.

3. How does the narrator describe Jamal’s sister Sassy?

“Sassy was eight, and coffee colored like her father, but she had wide eyes like Mama and Jamal.” (Pg. 9)

4. Who is Mack, and what does Jamal think of him?

Mack is Randy’s fifteen-year-old friend and cohort in the Scorpions. Jamal does not like Mack, finding the way Mack talks strange and his behavior too violent.

5. Myers writes that the pigeons are “like stones on the edge of the roof.” (Pg. 11) What is the literary term for this kind of comparison?

This kind of comparison is called a simile.

6. For what crime was Randy sent to prison?

Randy, Mack, and Willie Pugh attempted to rob a delicatessen. During the robbery, the deli owner was shot and killed. Randy, at seventeen, was tried as an adult.

7. What literary device is the author using when he writes, “[h]e hadn’t known then that Mack had been involved in the murder, and that Randy had been with him.”? (Pg. 14)

Here, at the end of Chapter Two, Myers uses foreshadowing to hint at events to come.

Chapter Three

Vocabulary

raggedy–run-down; cheap

1. In this chapter, Jamal is lectured for two things: being late for class and failing to turn in his homework. Is either of these things Jamal’s fault? Support your answers with examples from the book.

Answers will vary.

No. “I’m going to be late waiting for her [Sassy],’ Jamal said.” (Pg. 15)

Yes. “Jamal had stopped to talk to Malcolm in the hall and was late for class.” (Pg. 16)

No. “‘You didn’t give out no homework yesterday,’ Jamal said.” (Pg.17)

Yes. “Mrs. Rich stood up. ‘It was on the board for three days.’” (Pg. 17)

2. “I would ask you to bring your mother to school, but she probably doesn’t care any more about your education than you do.” (Pg. 16) When Principal Davidson says this, what may the reader infer about his attitude towards Jamal?

The reader may infer that the principal has negatively judged Jamal. He has also judged Jamal’s mother as being apathetic about her son’s education. Mr. Davidson knows that Jamal has been late; he does not, however, seem to understand or even care to know the reasons why.

3. What class is Jamal’s favorite and why?

Grammar is Jamal’s favorite class; although he does not like the subject, he likes Miss Brown, the teacher.

4. According to Jamal, what happens when one does something good as opposed to when one does something bad?

According to Jamal, when you do something wrong, everyone gets angry, and when you do something good, nobody notices or acts like it’s anything special.

5. What does the author say is the “one thing that Jamal could do”? (Pg. 20)

Jamal loves to draw, and he is good at it.

6. What event is Jamal looking forward to, and how does his anticipation affect him?

Jamal is looking forward to the seventh grade play. He wants to stay out of trouble and do his homework every day, so nothing will prevent him from painting backgrounds, or his mother from coming to see his work.

7. Who is Dwayne and how does he make Jamal feel?

Dwayne is an older boy who bullies Jamal. He makes Jamal feel small inside.

Chapter Four

Vocabulary

bodega—market

abuela—Spanish for “grandmother”

menacing—threatening

1. How does Miss Brown disappoint Jamal, and what is his reaction?

In preparation for the play, she tells Jamal to open windows to air the room rather than paint scenery. Although unhappy, Jamal does as she requests.

2. Describe the relationship between Tito and Jamal.

Tito and Jamal are like brothers, spending time at each other’s houses and sharing clothes. They are protective of each other. Tito looks up to Jamal and does not want to displease him.

3. What does Jamal do at the park?

He draws trees.

4. What is the author alluding to in the following passage?

“The thin man put his hand on his back pocket and left it there. The teenager looked at him sullenly, then walked slowly on.” (Pg. 36)

The author is inferring that the man conceals a gun in his back pocket.

5. What sort of business is carried out in the boarded-up store where Jamal looks for Mack?

The boarded-up store is a crack house; crack is sold there.

6. Who actually murdered the deli owner?

Randy killed the deli owner, although he said that Willie did it.

7. Why is Jamal unable to visit Randy at the prison?

One has to be at least fourteen to visit the prison and Jamal is only twelve.

8. Why is Jamal angry with Randy?

Jamal is mad at Randy because of the sorrow Randy has caused his mother.

Chapter Five

Vocabulary

winos–drunks

1. What is Mack referring to when he speaks of “dust”? (Pg. 42)

Mack is referring to money.

2. How much money does Randy’s lawyer need for an appeal?

He needs five hundred dollars to begin the appeal, which will cost two thousand dollars.

3. Throughout this chapter, the characters discuss ways to raise the appeal money. What are they?

Jamal could get the money by taking over the Scorpions, who work for drug dealers.

Jamal’s mother could get extra work.

Jamal and Tito could carry packages from the A & P.

Jamal’s mother could borrow the money from Mr. Stanton.

Jamal could get an after school job.

4. What does Mack say will make the older boys accept twelve-year-old Jamal as leader of the Scorpions?

Mack tells Jamal that he will protect him, the same way he protected Randy. Moreover, he offers Jamal a gun, saying “You be twenty one with what I got for you.” (Pg. 44)

5. Why do the Scorpions want Randy to stay in prison?

Mack says the gang does not want anyone seventeen or older, because they can be tried as adults and testify against other gang members.

6. How does Jamal feel about Randy getting out of prison?

Jamal feels that Randy will only get into trouble again and cause his mother more pain.

Chapter Six

1. Jamal and Oswaldo get caught playing in the halls. Mr. Davidson gives Oswaldo a warning. Why does he not warn Jamal, and what can the reader infer from this?

The principal thinks it will do no good to warn Jamal; he has given up on Jamal entirely.

2. Dwayne mocks Jamal when he thinks Jamal has given the wrong answer in class. What does he do when he finds out that Jamal was right?

Dwayne continues to laugh even after learning that Jamal was right.

3. What do Jamal and Tito hope to own when they grow up?

Jamal and Tito want to own boats when they grow up.

4. After Tito and Jamal spend the afternoon along the water, Tito's asthma begins to act up. What happens when the boys approach two police officers for help?

Jamal explains to the men that Tito has asthma and they have no money. He asks if they can ride the train home, since Tito is unable to walk all the way uptown. The police officers raise their voices and their nightsticks, and wave the boys away.

Chapter Seven

Vocabulary

scope—take a look at; evaluate

1. Jamal’s mother says that her burn “ain’t nothing.” (Pg. 67) How can Jamal tell that she is in pain?

Jamal notices that his mother’s teeth are clenched and her eyes are closed and can tell she is in pain.

2. How does Jamal try to spare his mother any further pain?

To spare her pain, Jamal puts on his shirt even though it is only half-ironed; he wants to keep her from trying to continue ironing.

3. What transpires between Dwayne and Jamal in class?

Dwayne picks on Jamal about his wrinkled shirt. He kicks Jamal; Jamal kicks him back. When the teacher intervenes, Dwayne says he will get Jamal outside.

4. How does Tito feel about the prospect of a fight between Dwayne and Jamal?

Tito says Dwayne is too big for Jamal to fight and thinks that Jamal should walk away.

5. Why does Jamal fight Dwayne instead of walking away when he has the chance?

Jamal does not feel like fighting, but he does not want to “punk out.” (Pg. 69)

6. How does the fight between Jamal and Dwayne end?

Two mailmen separate Jamal and Dwayne, ending the fight before anyone wins.

7. The author does not tell us directly that Jamal is thinking of joining the scorpions, but he shows us through one of Jamal’s actions. What action of Jamal’s makes it clear that he is considering becoming a Scorpion?

It is clear that Jamal is considering becoming a Scorpion when he tries on one of Randy’s old Scorpions jackets.

8. Mrs. Rich comments on the fact that Jamal is not paying attention in class. Why is he having a hard time paying attention?

Jamal is having a hard time paying attention because his mind is on his mother’s injury and how she had to work so late the previous night.

9. Tito disapproves of the Scorpions. Why does he agree to join the gang if Jamal joins?

Tito agrees to join the Scorpions because he thinks that if both he and Jamal are in the gang, they might be able to get the Scorpions to do "some good things, too." (Pg. 78)

10. With Jamal as the leader, what will Mack's position in the Scorpions be?

Mack will be Jamal's "warlord."

Chapter Eight

1. Describe the Scorpions' base of operations.

The Scorpions meet in an old boarded-up firehouse behind Marcus Garvey Park. They use a small ladder to climb in the window, over which a black and gold scorpion is painted. Inside sits a television and some wooden chairs.

2. Who are the six original members of the Scorpions?

They are Mack, Randy, Angel, Blood, Terry, and Indian. Bobby Welcome is a new member.

3. Do members of the Scorpions want Jamal to replace Randy? Why or why not?

No. The Scorpions think Jamal is too young and inexperienced. Jamal is only twelve and all the other members of the gang are fourteen or older.

4. What does Mack mean when he says that Jamal will “put you to sleep faster than your mama did when you was little”? (Pg. 83)

Mack means that Jamal will kill quickly.

5. Why does Jamal avoid looking at Tito in the Scorpion's clubhouse?

Jamal avoids looking at Tito because he thinks if he sees that Tito is afraid, he will be unable to hide his own fear.

6. Where does Jamal hide the gun?

Jamal hides the gun in the sofa in his family's apartment.

7. What does Jamal remember about his father?

*Jamal remembers his father running around a playground with him and his sister. He remembers his father losing his job, getting drunk all the time, and “being nasty to Mama.” (Pg. 88)
Finally, he remembers his mother leaving his father and taking the children with her.*

8. How does Jamal feel about his father?

Meyer's writes that “Jamal [feels] the same about his father as he [does] about Randy. They were both gone, and each of them had taken a little piece of Mama with them that they couldn't bring back.” (Pg. 88)

Chapter Nine

1. What does Jamal's father mean when he talks about "straightening" Jamal out? (Pg. 93)

Jamal's father means that he will beat Jamal with a belt if Jamal does not do well in school.

2. Jevon keeps mentioning "the Man." Who is "the Man"?

By "the man," Jevon does not mean any one particular man; he means the people that hold all the power.

3. What does Jamal's father think of Jamal?

Jamal's father thinks that Jamal is a "mama's boy" and should get a job. (Pg. 95)

4. Describe how Jamal feels when Jevon leaves.

He feels inadequate because of the things his father said about Jamal not acting like a man.

5. How does Jamal take the gun to school?

He puts the gun into a sneaker, ties it, and puts it in a paper bag with the sneaker's mate.

6. What is it that Tito tries to discourage Jamal from doing, and how?

He tries to stop Jamal from using the gun in his fight with Dwayne. At first, Tito refuses to carry the gun to the storeroom for Jamal. He does not want Jamal to use the gun, but he does not want Dwayne to beat Jamal, either. Tito finally agrees to carry the gun to the storeroom, and Jamal promises to return the gun to Mack when the fight is over.

7. What bothers Jamal worst about Dwayne?

It bothers Jamal that Dwayne is always laughing at people.

Chapter Ten

1. What role do the other students play in Jamal and Dwayne's fight in the storeroom?

Billy Ware pays money to see the fight. Other students crowd around the storeroom to listen to the fight.

2. Who locks the door to the storeroom?

Jamal locks the door.

3. Why does Jamal grab the gun in the storeroom? Does he intend to kill Dwayne?

Dwayne is older and stronger than Jamal. Jamal knows he cannot physically beat Dwayne, but he wants the bullying and the fight to stop. He grabs the gun to scare Dwayne, not to shoot him.

4. How does Dwayne react when Jamal brandishes the gun?

At first, Dwayne thinks the gun is just a cap pistol. Then Jamal convinces him that, as leader of the Scorpions, he would not carry a fake gun. Dwayne becomes terrified and begins to plead with Jamal. Dwayne ends up in a fetal position on the floor with his hands covering his face.

5. How does Jamal feel when the fight in the storeroom is over?

The fight in the storeroom devastates Jamal. He realizes his choice to threaten Dwayne with the gun is a life-altering one. He becomes afraid for his future. Will he go to jail or get probation? Will he have to leave home until the matter is forgotten?

6. According to Jamal, what happens to you when you are in jail?

When you are in jail, the bigger prisoners gang up on you and rape you.

7. What causes Jamal to think about Randy?

The drastic change in Jamal's circumstances, from when he leaves the house in the morning to when he runs away from school in the afternoon, triggers thoughts about Randy.

Chapter Eleven

Vocabulary

pivoted—turned around

plantains—banana-like fruits

recaito—seasoning

1. After the storeroom incident, Tito finds Jamal down by the river. Why do the two boys like to go there?

The boys like to look at the boats and imagine that they will own one some day. Tito often talks of getting a boat to go to Puerto Rico to see his father. The boats on the river may represent safety, freedom, and peace to the boys.

2. Who fires the gun in the park downtown, and who witnesses the firing?

Tito fires the gun and a white woman walking her dog sees him do it.

3. Once at home, what does Jamal fear? Of what does this remind him?

Jamal is afraid that Dwayne has told people about the gun; he thinks the police might show up at any moment to take him away. This reminds him of when the police came to arrest Randy.

4. According to Jamal, what can anyone who lives on his block eventually expect to have happen?

According to Jamal, “part of living on the block” is that “after a while you did something and the police came and got you.” (Pg. 117)

5. What is the significance of the fact that, when the cops took Randy away, he only had one shoe on and was not fully dressed?

Answers may vary. Example: The fact that the police took Randy away when he was half-dressed shows that they had no respect for his dignity.

6. What new element of fear plagues Jamal in relation to Dwayne?

Jamal is afraid Dwayne may have a gun.

Chapter Twelve

1. What makes Jamal feel good while working in the store?

Jamal feels good when customers ask him questions.

2. Why does the stern woman who calls Jamal “too weak” call him back to give him a dollar? (Pg. 126)

Jamal does not talk back to her, despite the fact that he carries her groceries up four flights of stairs and she only gives him a dime at first.

3. “Mr. Gonzalez didn’t even want to wait on customers. Jamal waited on them.” (Pg. 127)
What does this quote indicate about Mr. Gonzalez’s opinion of Jamal?

It indicates that Jamal has earned the trust of his employer by being responsible and competent.

5. Who happens to come into the store while Jamal is working?

Blood, a member of the Scorpions, walks in and tells Jamal that Indian is looking for him.

6. What happens to Tito when his grandmother finds the gun in her house?

Abuela tells Tito to leave and never come back. Tito walks to Jamal’s house. Jamal’s mother comforts and feeds Tito, and then Jamal walks him back to his grandmother’s house.

7. Where does Abuela hide the gun?

She hides the gun in her refrigerator.

8. How does Jamal express his support and gratitude to Tito?

Jamal holds Tito’s hand for a while and tells Tito that he is Jamal’s “best friend in the whole world.” (Pg. 134)

Chapter Thirteen

1. Why is Jamal in the principal's office again?

Jamal gets all the answers on his social studies test wrong. However, the principal is already expecting Dwayne and his mother, so Jamal remains until they arrive. Dwayne has told her about Jamal threatening him with a gun and she wants the police involved.

2. Why do you think Mr. Davidson refuses to involve the police when Mrs. parsons asks him to?

Answers may vary. Example: Mr. Davidson does not want to involve the police because of the scandal and the negative attention it would bring to his school.

3. What does Mr. Davidson hope to accomplish in his meeting with Jamal's mother?

Mr. Davidson hopes to convince Jamal's mother to remove Jamal from the school and put him in a place for kids "with serious problems." (Pg. 139)

4. What can the reader infer about Abuela's being sick?

Abuela has lost her strength. She is tired of fighting the battle of rearing a good boy in a place where negative influences surround and corrupt him. When she finds the gun, she takes to her bed, as if to say, "I give up."

5. Why does Jamal lose his job?

When Jamal goes to work, Angel and Indian are waiting for him. Mr. Gonzalez has a baseball bat; he obviously feels threatened. The boys are there to call Jamal out in regards to leadership of the gang. Mr. Gonzalez feels he has no choice but to fire Jamal.

6. What does Jamal notice about the way Indian looks?

Jamal notices that Indian looks "high." (Pg. 143)

7. How does Jamal feel about Mr. Gonzalez having fired him?

Jamal does not blame Mr. Gonzalez. He feels angry at Angel and Indian.

Chapter Fourteen

Vocabulary

hallowed—made holy

veered—swerved; turned suddenly

convicted—found guilty

1. How does Jamal feel when he learns that Randy has been stabbed?

Jamal ponders how “[t]hings happened to his family, the same way things happened to him.” (Pg. 146) It seems to him that his family never makes things happen themselves.

2. What does this chapter reveal about Sassy?

Sassy is quite self-sufficient. She uses the four dollars her mother leaves them to get groceries for dinner. She prepares chicken, rice, and peas. Later, she gets in a verbal battle with Jamal about the gun, which she has surmised is hidden in the house. Sassy proves herself an extraordinary eight-year-old.

3. Who visits the Hicks family when Mama returns from visiting Randy?

Reverend Biggs comes to pray with the family.

4. What further pressure is put upon Jamal in this chapter?

He cannot go out to dispose of the gun. In addition, his mother says, “I can’t stand to have you weak, Jamal.” (Pg. 156)

5. In what way does Sassy protect Jamal?

She does not tell her mother about the gun.

6. What is Sassy worried about?

Sassy admits to Jamal that there were times when she did not like Randy. She is worried that God might let Randy die because of how she felt.

Chapter Fifteen

Vocabulary

sauntering—walking slowly and casually

1. Why do Jamal and Tito walk to a crack house instead of going to school?

Jamal wants to find Mack and give him back the gun. He also wants to relinquish leadership of the Scorpions before Indian comes after him.

2. How does Tito describe the people in the park, and why do they scare him?

Tito says, "They look like they thrown-away people...[t]hat makes me scared because I don't want to be no thrown-away guy." (Pg. 161)

3. Where, and in what condition, do Jamal and Tito find Mack?

Mack is in the park. His eyes are bloodshot and his breath reeks of wine.

4. Why does Jamal keep the gun?

Jamal tells Tito that he could not give the gun to Mack in front of all the people in the park. Tito, however, is very insightful. He says, "I think you like that gun, man." (Pg. 164)

5. What conclusions do Tito and Jamal draw about Mack?

The boys believe Mack will spend the ten dollars Jamal gives him on crack. They believe he is addicted to crack cocaine and alcohol.

6. What does Jamal think about his father?

Jamal thinks his father does not like Jamal's pictures or Jamal himself.

7. How does Tito reason with Jamal about the gun? What is Jamal's response?

Tito tells Jamal about a time when he got beat up. He says he prayed for his attacker to die, then goes on to say, "...but he didn't die and I didn't die so everything was okay. If I had a gun, maybe I would have shot him or something." (Pg. 168) Jamal says, however, "If he knew you had a gun, he wouldn't mess with you." (Pg. 169)

8. What does Jamal tell Tito about fear?

Jamal tells Tito that there is nothing wrong with being scared, and that [e]verybody's scared of something unless they using crack or something." (Pg. 169)

Chapter Sixteen

Vocabulary

beckoned—summoned

gravelly—rough

hincty—snobbish or aloof

blackjack—piece of lead used as a weapon

1. What phone calls does Jamal make from home?

First, he calls Mr. Davidson to respond to a letter on behalf of his mother. He explains that his mother is visiting Randy in the hospital. The secretary tells him to report to school the next day. Then, he calls Griff's Bar-B-Que Joint to contact Indian. He speaks with Angel, who finally tells him the Scorpions will meet him in Marcus Garvey Park tomorrow night.

2. What does Jamal plan to do if Indian tries to beat him up the next day?

Jamal plans to "take it like a man," then "walk away." (Pg. 176)

3. Why does the principal take Jamal to the nurse's office?

School officials have decided to put Jamal on medication to help him "stay calm" and they need his mother to sign a release form. (Pg. 177)

4. What does Mrs. Roberts ask Jamal about his mother that slightly offends Jamal?

Mrs. Roberts asks Jamal if his mother can read.

5. How is the situation between Jamal and Dwayne concluded?

Dwayne's mother warns Dwayne to stay away from Jamal. Dwayne asks Jamal what he wants to do, and Jamal replies, "You better do what your mama say...stay away from me." (Pg. 178)

6. What is Jamal's mother upset about?

Jamal's mother has asked her employer, Mr. Stanton, to lend her a thousand dollars for Randy's appeal. (Randy's lawyer is asking for less money this time, since it will be cheaper to get a new trial than to protect him from the other inmates or take care of him in the prison hospital.) Eventually, Mr. Stanton calls Mama and tells her he cannot give her the loan.

Chapter Seventeen

Vocabulary

cellophane—plastic
peer—look intently

1. Who tries to engage Jamal in conversation on Tito's stoop, and with what result?

A wino offers to tell Jamal his life story. Jamal rebuffs his attempts to talk to him. As Myers puts it, Jamal does not “ want to be like him, or look like him, or see him.” (Pg. 184)

2. Why is Tito late meeting Jamal?

Tito tries to wait until Abuela goes to sleep. However, his grandmother senses there is something wrong and does not go to bed. Tito has to make up an excuse to get out of the house.

3. What does Tito mean when he says his grandmother looked at him with her “quiet eyes”? (Pg. 185)

Tito is referring to Abuela's intuitiveness. She can sense when Tito is lying and when trouble is coming. He says her quiet eyes “get real calm, like she's tired or something, only you know she's not tired.” (Pg. 186)

4. Why does Tito have the gun?

Jamal gives Tito the gun to hold. After Jamal makes sure there will be no trouble with Indian, he plans to tell Tito to hand Indian the gun.

5. Why is Indian angry even after Jamal surrenders the leadership of the Scorpions to him?

Indian is angry because Jamal states that he is giving up membership as well as leadership; Indian thinks Jamal should have asked Indian's permission to quit the Scorpions.

6. Myers does not explicitly tell us what happens at the end of the chapter. What can we infer from what Myers *does* tell us?

We can infer that Tito shot Angel.

Chapter Eighteen

Vocabulary

hyperactive—over-excited; too active

1. What does Jamal do with the gun?

Jamal throws the gun in a dumpster and throws garbage on top of it.

2. What observation does the author make about Tito's appearance after the shooting?

Myers writes that Tito looks "as if somebody had drawn his face and just made dark holes where the eyes should have been." (Pg. 196)

3. How does Tito feel about the shooting?

Tito cannot stop crying and shaking and he vomits on the sidewalk; these are physical manifestations of the trauma he is suffering. He feels guilty and begins to fear God's punishment.

4. What are Jamal's fears in the wake of the shooting?

The streets are dark and Jamal fears Angel may be lurking in the shadows with a gun. Moreover, Jamal knows that some of the Scorpions know where he lives. He is afraid they will be waiting for him at his house or, worse, that they may harm Mama and Sassy.

5. Why does Jamal tell Tito not to come over to his house?

Jamal is trying to protect Tito from the Scorpions, since some of them know where Jamal lives.

6. What does Jamal tell his mother about the pills the nurse gives him every day?

Jamal tells his mother that the pills are vitamins and that all of the older kids are taking them.

Chapter Nineteen

Vocabulary

possession—carrying drugs

1. What change has taken place in Mama's attitude toward Randy?

Mama seems to have put some emotional distance between herself and Randy. She has exhausted her options and, in so doing, has accepted the fact that she can be of little use to him. She chooses, instead, to focus her energy on Sassy and Jamal.

2. What suspicion does Mama harbor concerning Jamal?

Mama notices Jamal's depression and fatigue and asks him if he is doing drugs. She even searches the couch.

3. Myers writes of Jamal's words, "They had lain in the bottom of his stomach like rocks weighing his whole life down." (Pg. 213) What is the literary term for this kind of comparison?

The literary term used here is a simile.

4. Who is waiting for Jamal outside his building and why?

Mack is waiting to tell Jamal that Mack "wasted Angel and Indian." (Pg. 205)

5. Who does Indian think shot him and Angel?

Indian thinks Mack shot them.

6. What does Jamal convince Mack to do?

Jamal convinces Mack that he must take over the Scorpions without Jamal.

7. How does the author use irony in the conversation between Mack and Jamal?

Mack, who has just boasted about killing Angel and putting Indian in the hospital, tells Jamal, "You got to be nice to your Mama, 'cause when she gone, it's a hurting thing." (Pg. 208)

Chapter Twenty

Vocabulary

tenement—apartment building

1. How do the Scorpions arrive at Angel’s funeral?

They arrive wearing the gang’s colors (black and gold) in Lincolns supplied by drug dealers.

2. How has the shooting affected Tito and his friendship with Jamal?

Tito remains sick. He has lost weight and looks pale. Jamal takes up a vigil on Tito’s stoop, but Abuela will not allow Jamal to see him.

3. What does Mr. Davidson have planned for Jamal?

Mr. Davidson wants to transfer Jamal to a school for problem children.

4. What does Mama want Jamal to do?

Mama seems to want Jamal to go to North Carolina for the rest of the school year.

5. Why is Tito going to Puerto Rico?

The police have told Tito that if he goes to Puerto Rico he will not be in trouble for the shooting.

6. What does Jamal give to Tito, and what does it represent?

Jamal gives Tito the portrait he did of Tito. It represents Jamal wanting to give Tito the best part of himself. Myers writes, “It was the best drawing [Jamal] had done in his whole life.” (Pg.214)

7. Describe the tone of the novel’s final passage.

The last passage is overwhelmingly sad. Because of his own poor choices, Jamal loses his best friend. Jamal is sorry for not throwing the gun away when Tito said they should. Tito’s cab pulls away and Jamal must remain behind in the city. The author uses the weather to help create a chilling loneliness: “[t]he wind picked up. It was colder, much colder than it had been...Jamal pulled his collar up against the wind.” (Pg. 216)

8. Why do you think Myers included the short staring contest between Jamal and the “tall kid in sneakers” right at the end of the book? (Pg. 216)

Answers may vary. Example: Myers includes this scene to show that nothing in the neighborhood has changed; there will continue to be fights and challenges.

Scorpions

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Chapter One

Vocabulary

appeal–new trial

1. From what point of view does the author tell this story?
2. Who is the protagonist in this story?
3. What does Jamal see outside his window while waiting for his mother to come home? What does this tell the reader about Jamal and the neighborhood in which his family lives?
4. Why are Jamal and his little sister Sassy home alone?
5. How long is Randy supposed to remain in prison?
6. Describe the style of the dialogue in this chapter. For example, is it formal or realistic?

Chapter Two

Vocabulary

addle—scatter; confuse

briskly—rapidly

1. In Chapter One, Jamal and Sassy have to save some dinner for their mother, even though Sassy is still hungry. In this chapter, we learn that Jamal sleeps on a pullout bed in the living room, and the family has been without hot water for two days. What is the author trying to convey with these bits of information?
2. What type of music does Jamal's mother listen to?
3. How does the narrator describe Jamal's sister Sassy?
4. Who is Mack, and what does Jamal think of him?
5. Myers writes that the pigeons are "like stones on the edge of the roof." (Pg. 11) What is the literary term for this kind of comparison?
6. For what crime was Randy sent to prison?
7. What literary device is the author using when he writes, "[h]e hadn't known then that Mack had been involved in the murder, and that Randy had been with him."? (Pg. 14)

Chapter Three

Vocabulary

raggedy–run-down; cheap

1. In this chapter, Jamal is lectured for two things: being late for class and failing to turn in his homework. Is either of these things Jamal's fault? Support your answers with examples from the book.
2. "I would ask you to bring your mother to school, but she probably doesn't care any more about your education than you do." (Pg. 16) When Principal Davidson says this, what may the reader infer about his attitude towards Jamal?
3. What class is Jamal's favorite and why?
4. According to Jamal, what happens when one does something good as opposed to when one does something bad?
5. What does the author say is the "one thing that Jamal could do"? (Pg. 20)
6. What event is Jamal looking forward to, and how does his anticipation affect him?
7. Who is Dwayne and how does he make Jamal feel?

Chapter Four

Vocabulary

bodega–market

abuela–Spanish for “grandmother”

menacing–threatening

1. How does Miss Brown disappoint Jamal, and what is his reaction?
2. Describe the relationship between Tito and Jamal.
3. What does Jamal do at the park?
4. What is the author alluding to in the following passage?
“The thin man put his hand on his back pocket and left it there. The teenager looked at him sullenly, then walked slowly on.” (Pg. 36)
5. What sort of business is carried out in the boarded-up store where Jamal looks for Mack?
6. Who actually murdered the deli owner?
7. Why is Jamal unable to visit Randy at the prison?
8. Why is Jamal angry with Randy?

Chapter Five

Vocabulary

winos–drunks

1. What is Mack referring to when he speaks of “dust”? (Pg. 42)
2. How much money does Randy’s lawyer need for an appeal?
3. Throughout this chapter, the characters discuss ways to raise the appeal money. What are they?
4. What does Mack say will make the older boys accept twelve-year-old Jamal as leader of the Scorpions?
5. Why do the Scorpions want Randy to stay in prison?
6. How does Jamal feel about Randy getting out of prison?

Chapter Six

1. Jamal and Oswaldo get caught playing in the halls. Mr. Davidson gives Oswaldo a warning. Why does he not warn Jamal, and what can the reader infer from this?
2. Dwayne mocks Jamal when he thinks Jamal has given the wrong answer in class. What does he do when he finds out that Jamal was right?
3. What do Jamal and Tito hope to own when they grow up?
4. After Tito and Jamal spend the afternoon along the water, Tito's asthma begins to act up. What happens when the boys approach two police officers for help?

Chapter Seven

Vocabulary

scope—take a look at; evaluate

1. Jamal's mother says that her burn "ain't nothing." (Pg. 67) How can Jamal tell that she is in pain?
2. How does Jamal try to spare his mother any further pain?
3. What transpires between Dwayne and Jamal in class?
4. How does Tito feel about the prospect of a fight between Dwayne and Jamal?
5. Why does Jamal fight Dwayne instead of walking away when he has the chance?
6. How does the fight between Jamal and Dwayne end?
7. The author does not tell us directly that Jamal is thinking of joining the scorpions, but he shows us through one of Jamal's actions. What action of Jamal's makes it clear that he is considering becoming a Scorpion?

Chapter Eight

1. Describe the Scorpions' base of operations.
2. Who are the six original members of the Scorpions?
3. Do members of the Scorpions want Jamal to replace Randy? Why or why not?
4. What does Mack mean when he says that Jamal will “put you to sleep faster than your mama did when you were little”? (Pg. 83)
5. Why does Jamal avoid looking at Tito in the Scorpion's clubhouse?
6. Where does Jamal hide the gun?
7. What does Jamal remember about his father?
8. How does Jamal feel about his father?

Chapter Nine

1. What does Jamal's father mean when he talks about "straightening" Jamal out? (Pg. 93)
2. Jevon keeps mentioning "the Man." Who is "the Man"?
3. What does Jamal's father think of Jamal?
4. Describe how Jamal feels when Jevon leaves.
5. How does Jamal take the gun to school?
6. What is it that Tito tries to discourage Jamal from doing, and how?
7. What bothers Jamal worst about Dwayne?

Chapter Ten

1. What role do the other students play in Jamal and Dwayne's fight in the storeroom?
2. Who locks the door to the storeroom?
3. Why does Jamal grab the gun in the storeroom? Does he intend to kill Dwayne?
4. How does Dwayne react when Jamal brandishes the gun?
5. How does Jamal feel when the fight in the storeroom is over?
6. According to Jamal, what happens to you when you are in jail?
7. What causes Jamal to think about Randy?

Chapter Eleven

Vocabulary

pivoted—turned around

plantains—banana-like fruits

recaito—seasoning

1. After the storeroom incident, Tito finds Jamal down by the river. Why do the two boys like to go there?
2. Who fires the gun in the park downtown, and who witnesses the firing?
3. Once at home, what does Jamal fear? Of what does this remind him?
4. According to Jamal, what can anyone who lives on his block eventually expect to have happen?
5. What is the significance of the fact that, when the cops took Randy away, he only had one shoe on and was not fully dressed?
6. What new element of fear plagues Jamal in relation to Dwayne?

Chapter Twelve

1. What makes Jamal feel good while working in the store?
2. Why does the stern woman who calls Jamal “too weak” call him back to give him a dollar? (Pg. 126)
3. “Mr. Gonzalez didn’t even want to wait on customers. Jamal waited on them.” (Pg. 127)
What does this quote indicate about Mr. Gonzalez’s opinion of Jamal?
5. Who happens to come into the store while Jamal is working?
6. What happens to Tito when his grandmother finds the gun in her house?
7. Where does Abuela hide the gun?
8. How does Jamal express his support and gratitude to Tito?

Chapter Thirteen

1. Why is Jamal in the principal's office again?
2. Why do you think Mr. Davidson refuses to involve the police when Mrs. parsons asks him to?
3. What does Mr. Davidson hope to accomplish in his meeting with Jamal's mother?
4. What can the reader infer about Abuela's being sick?
5. Why does Jamal lose his job?
6. What does Jamal notice about the way Indian looks?
7. How does Jamal feel about Mr. Gonzalez having fired him?

Chapter Fourteen

Vocabulary

hallowed—made holy

veered—swerved; turned suddenly

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6. What is Sassy worried about?

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4. What does Mama want Jamal to do?
5. Why is Tito going to Puerto Rico?
6. What does Jamal give to Tito, and what does it represent?
7. Describe the tone of the novel’s final passage.
8. Why do you think Myers included the short staring contest between Jamal and the “tall kid in sneakers” right at the end of the book? (Pg. 216)

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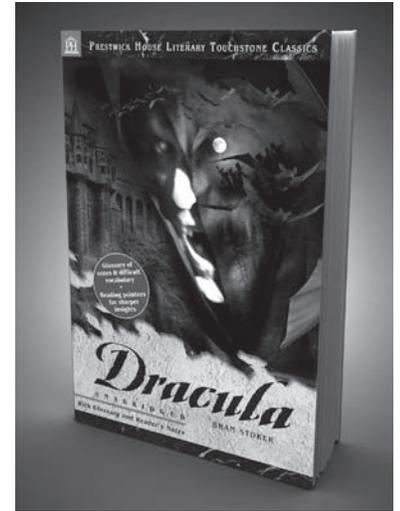
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