

Walter Dean Myers

Picture:



<https://www.proprofs.com/quiz-school/story.php?title=game-by-walter-dean-myers>

Website: <http://walterdeanmyers.net/>

Biography: Walter Dean Myers

Walter Dean Myers was born in Martinsburg, West Virginia. His family was very poor, 'West Virginia poor' as Myers described it. His mother passed away while he was only 2 years old. Myers had family that was poor, jailed, and even murdered. He spent most of his teenage years in Harlem and ended up dropping out of high school at the young age of 17 to join the military (Myers). Myers published his *New York Times* best seller, *Monster*, in 1999. He had a very accomplished career with many awards including a reception of the Margaret A. Edwards Award for young adult literature. As a well established young adult author, and Myers' published over 100 books including memoirs, fiction, poetry & short story compilations, young children literature, and even sci-fi.

Summary: *Monster*

Monster by Walter Dean Myers, is a screenplay written from the perspective of the main character, Steve Harmon. Steve Harmon is being trialed with a possible sentence of 25 to life w/o parole for an alleged felony charge of robbery and murder in the state of New York. Steve is creating the script based on this trial because of his interest in creating film, but the screenplay is often interrupted with journal entries while he is being held in jail. Harmon shares intimate and graphic details about his experience in jail, as well as his affiliation with the other young men being charged with the same crime. Steve's family awaits his verdict that determines whether or not he will be able to return home, or if their innocent son will spend the rest of his life in jail.

Quote:

"CU of STEVE's face. He is terrified.

VO (as camera focuses on STEVE's face)

Open your legs; we have to plug up your butt so you don't mess yourself as you die" (73).

Significance: The purpose with sharing this kind of information, while it is profoundly graphic, is to create an atmosphere for the reader to be able to understand. It establishes a fear for readers that may not be able to comprehend the severity of the hostile environment in jail. It could potentially seem over the top, but in actuality these actions did occur with these procedures in 1999. It only emphasizes the reality to make the anxiety recognizable and obvious. It also shows how casually crude guards can be to inmates. It is obvious that death penalty is only bestowed on criminals that have committed severe crimes, but the guards are only adding to this person's punishment.

Quote: "King curled his lip and narrowed his eyes. What was he going to do, scare me? All of a sudden he looked funny. All the times I looked at him and wanted to be tough like him, and now I saw him sitting in handcuffs and trying to scare me. How could he scare me?" (96).

Significance: This is a moment where Steve can reflect on his own insecurity of fitting a standard of "wanting to be tough." But he notices the situation he is in and he doesn't want to be identified with that status anymore. Not only does he not want to be identified

with it, but learns through these events of being in jail, trialed, and interrogated that that life is not worth it. Steve understands that even though he hasn't lived the life of "being tough," he has already been through the *toughest* environment to encounter and people who do identify with that life are not a status of intimidation to him.

Quote: "If anybody looking at this case believes that the store was not cased, that Mr. Harmon just 'happened' to be at the drug store, although now he says he doesn't remember where he was, then they should find him not guilty. I don't think that is possible either" (260).

Significance: In this scene the prosecuting attorney is claiming that he must have been involved with the robbery/murder because how could he have "just happened" to be there. This is a tactic that is used by a person whose profession is grounded in studying the law as she attempts to strip his innocence because he is a young black man who was at a scene of a crime. She ignores possibilities and threatens to put his life on the line because "just happened to be there" isn't suffice enough of an excuse for Steve Harmon.

Text Complexity: According to Walter Dean Myers website, the book is claimed to be meant for the ages of 13+ or the grades 9th - 12th. The Lexile Measure grade is 670L, which determines it could be read from a range starting from 3rd grade. Due to the content, I would not suggest this kind of writing to a third grader and would agree with the Myers' suggestion.

Style: Coming from the Steve Harmon's perspective, the book is centered a lot around Steve's paranoia, fear, and anxiety of spending his life in prison. Steve has to face the possibility of being discriminated so harshly for the color of his skin he may go to prison for innocence. Steve's lawyer, O'Brien, even tells him that because he is young and black, he is practically already decided as guilty by the jury in the beginning of a trail (Myers 78-79). He is aware that he is being analyzed by a prosecutor, a jury, and a judge, who all declare the verdict. I would categorize this with Chapter six of *Adolescents in the Search For Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story*. It covers teens that face identity struggles and discrimination. Teens reading a book like *Monster* would help them understand the struggles others may have to face that they don't. It would also show them how to face peer pressure and going against

unfortunate societal expectations. Myers has written many novels that represent black youth facing challenges that occur in the black community such as *Slam* and *Somewhere in the Darkness*. It was more than writing stories, but also supplying black youth answers for their potential obstacles.

Exeter Qualities: Literature for Today's Young Adults

6. Themes that inform truthfully about the wider world so as to allow readers to engage with difficult and challenging issues relating to immediate interests and global concerns

7. Themes that allow the possibility of emotional and intellectual growth through engagement with personal issues.

--While both of these are very similar, both can distinctly identify with *Monster*. Young adults will gain perspective through reading this book and will have intellectual growth from understanding and comprehending the struggle Steve Harmon has to face. It will also allow readers to gain insight that could be used in global concerns by being able to recognize conflict of discrimination and the treatment of inmates.

Citations:

Myers, Walter Dean. *Monster*. HarperCollins, 1999 New York.

Monster - Lexile Find a Book. MetaMetrics, Inc, 2018.

<https://fab.lexile.com/book/details/9780060280772/> Accessed 25 September 2018.

"Walter Dean Myers." *Youtube*, uploaded by Walter Dean Myers, 8 April 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=funK7DKaPwI>