

# Monster

Walter Dean Myers

<https://walterdeanmyers.net/>

Alberto Camacho - Engl 112B

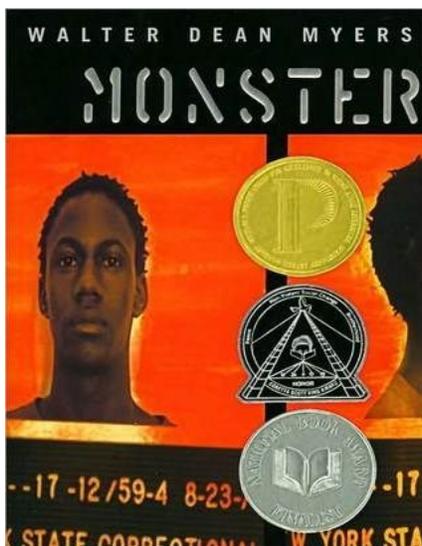
Walter Dean Myers was born August 12, 1937, in Martinsburg, West Virginia. He was born Walter Milton Myers but after his mom died two years later he was given to Florence and Herbert Dean who lived in Harlem. Mr. Myers life “revolved around his



neighborhood and church. The neighborhood protected him and the church guided him.” His speech impediment was often made fun of and he lead with his fists.

Mr. Myers wrote *Monster* in 1999. He was inspired

by a boy who was facing trial for a “stick up.” When Myers asked him what his role was in the “stick up,” the boy answered, “I was doing the shooting.” He was switching from 1st to 3rd person and Myers noted that these kids would speak about their lives in 1st person but of their crimes in 3rd person. “They distanced themselves from the crime.”



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## Summary:

Monster is a beautiful story that tells us the harsh realities that a black or brown person have to go through when in pursuit of justice. Steve Harmon is a sixteen year old boy who’s on trial for his being “involved in a murder of a drugstore owner.” The trial is set in Harlem and his D.A. believes that since he’s black, race is going to be a factor. Steve narrates the story as a film script, switching scenes or cutting to Steve’s own personal written narratives. His experience with the

judicial system is rather optimistic because he knows that he's not the Monster people are claiming him to be.

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### **Text Complexity**

LEXILE RANGE 610L - 800L (3rd-5th grade)

I think Monster received this score because the language Myers uses is rather simple. There are not any complex sentences nor is there any elevated vocabulary. The subject matter is rather heavy and dense for some readers who may have not been indirectly involved with the judicial system, while those who have been indirectly involved with the judicial system may have a better understanding of the novel.

New Dale-Chall Readability Index: Grade level: Grades 5 - 6

I believe that the score given is justified because of the text and its simplicity, although the subject matter is rather dense and heavy for a student in 5th-6th grade.

ATOS Book Level: 5.1 Interest Level: Upper Grades (UG 9-12) AR Points: 5.0

I think of all three tests, the ATOS Book Level test is the most accurate. Most students have an understanding of the judicial system later on in their middle school careers or beginning their freshman year of high school.

Monster also fits very well with Exeter qualities 1, 2, 4, 5, & 7. I think of the five mentioned, Exeter qualities 1 & 2 are universal with many texts. Mr. Myers technique of writing this as a screenplay with mini narratives inserted draws the reader in and creates for an interesting plot. While Exeter qualities 4, 5, & 7 aren't so universal to some readers. If the readers haven't experienced the judicial system, discrimination, or lived in a neighborhood where more often than not cops are harassing you, they may not be able to understand the frustration that Steve went through. While this book may give them a very shallow idea of what that feeling is, they aren't able to fully wrap their head or heart around Steves situation.

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### **Quotes**

"Monster! The story of my miserable life. The incredible story of how one guy's life was turned around by a few events and how he might spend the rest of his life behind bars. Told as it actually happened!" (8-9)

Steve's introduction to whatever hell he is going to go through highlights what it's like to be held in jail. The somewhat sarcastic tone highlights how expendable he feels being cooped up in a six by six cell.

"CUT TO: STEVE HARMON. Then: CU of the pad in front of him. He is writing the word *Monster* over and over again. A white hand (O'BRIEN's) takes the pencil from his hand and crosses out all the *Monsters*." (24)

Steve is taking the trial in. The prosecutor considers this sixteen year old black teen a Monster. The psychological game being played by his peers in the courtroom emphasizes the harsh realities this boy is going through. He feels like a literal monster despite his innocence and despite HIM knowing that he's innocent.

“Half of those jurors, no matter what they said when we questioned them when we picked the jury, believed you were guilty the moment they laid eyes on you. You're young, you're Black, and you're on trial. What else do they need to know?” (78-79)  
The topic of America: Racism. Twenty years later Racism is still a dark and frustrating issue. This quote speaks for itself.

“His name is Acie. He was telling everybody that he didn't care what they said about him... ‘All they can do is put me in jail,’ he said. ‘They can't touch my soul.’” (89)  
His celly needed money to get back on his feet so he did what was necessary, he knows that he's not a bad guy and so does Steve. Steve knows that he didn't do anything, but his soul is so fragile. He doesn't understand why he's here, he misses his life.

“Think about all the tomorrows of your life.” (205)

This quote reflects Steve's emotional state during the trial. During this journal entry he explains how O'Brien came to visit him and constantly patted his hand. He asked her if this meant that they were losing but she comforted him and said no, Steve though, didn't believe her. As he writes this, he thinks of a friend of his and I think of himself too. Almost as if he was forcing himself to be optimistic because he has so many tomorrow's going for him.

### **Why should teens read Monster?**

Teens should read Monster because I think it'll help some of them understand their privilege of not being persecuted because they're brown or black. A lot of affluent students confuse the loss of their teddy bear with the loss of someone's friend. Their lack of understanding when it comes to people's struggles is confusing to me. Why try to be something that you're not. On the other hand, this book helped me understand what was going on at home. I was young and oblivious to my brothers situation with the judicial system but the book brought me comfort, it allowed me to think that my brother was going to come home one day.

### **The Category:**

Monster falls under Chapter 4 in Adolescents in Search for Meaning: Tapping the powerful resource of story. *Testimonio*, narrative, or story is something that revolutionizing academia. Culturally, it is something that my family and other Mexican, Central or South American families have also practiced. The power of story as mentioned in Ch. 4, gathers real life experiences of characters who are in difficult positions. Steve has to make the decision of persistence or to flat out give up.

### **How to Teach The Novel:**

I would present this novel to my students as a fun project with a deeper meaning of appreciating our privilege of being able to wander the streets of East Side San José without much difficulty (because of the lack of cops). As they read the novel, I'd have them pick a moment in their life and make a screen play out of it. I'd then ask them if they'd want to submit their idea somewhere and see if it gets produced. The East Side has geniuses and I know that these kids have stories that'll resonate with other kids and maybe even motivate them to pursue their dreams.