



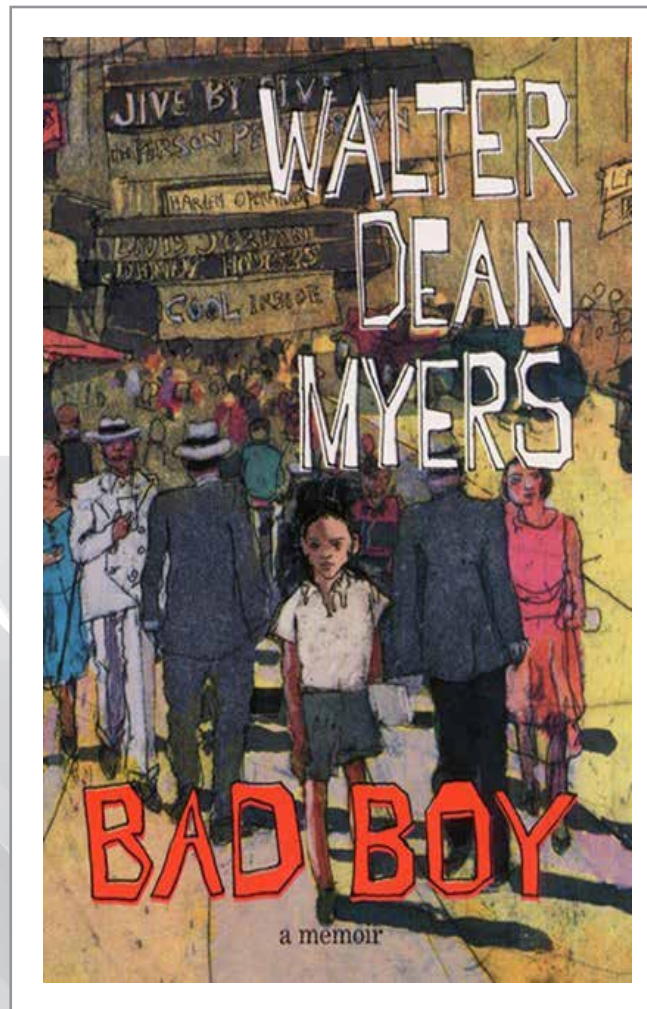
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Bad Boy: A Memoir

Walter Dean Myers



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Bad Boy: A Memoir

Walter Dean Myers

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Brainstorming, research,
decision making, pros/cons,
compare/contrast

Comprehension

Predicting, summarizing,
cause/effect, reviewing

Writing

Letter, poetry, thank-you
note, essay, review, report,
brochure, outline, time line

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, oral presentation,
music appreciation

Vocabulary

Definitions, pronunciations,
parts of speech, glossary

Literary Elements

Conflict, characterization,
irony, theme, point of view,
setting

Across the Curriculum

Social Studies—Harlem,
Brown vs. Board of Education,
Civil Rights Movement,
family genealogy;
Literature—James Weldon
Johnson, William
Shakespeare, Elizabeth
Barrett Browning, Langston
Hughes, Samuel Taylor
Coleridge; Art—sketch,
painting, collage; Music—
Harlem musicians, appropriate
selections; Health—scarlet
fever, depression/grief;
Sports—Brooklyn Dodgers,
Jackie Robinson, Wilt
Chamberlain

Genre: young-adult nonfiction

Setting: Harlem, 1940s and 1950s

Point of View: first person

Themes: coming of age, racism, family, isolation, value of education, perseverance

Conflict: person vs. person, person vs. self, person vs. society

Tone: reflective, thoughtful

Date of First Publication: 2001

Summary

In this memoir, Walter Dean Myers recounts and reflects upon his childhood in Harlem in the 1940s and 1950s and how it led to his chosen career as a writer. Young Walter's reading and writing skills are far ahead of others' his age, and he seems poised for academic success. However, a persistent stuttering problem and violent outbursts frequently get him into trouble, and Walter struggles to keep his behavior from overshadowing his intellect. As Walter matures, his passion for reading and writing consumes his life, and he finds himself questioning his ideals, his identity, and his place in the world.

About the Author

Walter Milton Myers was born on August 12, 1937. Myers' mother died when he was three, and his father sent him to be raised by his first wife Florence Dean and her husband Herbert. Though loved and supported at home, Myers did not perform well in school and suffered from a speech impediment. However, he did not allow this to stifle his fascination with reading and writing, at which he excelled. He attended Stuyvesant High School until he dropped out and joined the army at age 17 and later earned a BA at Empire State College. Myers has been writing full time for over 30 years. He lives in Jersey City, New Jersey, with his wife Constance and has three grown children.

Myers' first book for children, *Where Does the Day Go?*, was published in 1969. Since then he has published over 70 books and received numerous awards, including the Coretta Scott King Award and the Newbery Honor award. Myers was also the first recipient of the Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature for his book *Monster*. *Monster* and *Autobiography of My Dead Brother* were also National Book Award Finalists.

As a writer, Myers uses much of his personal experience and interests to develop his stories. While it is a great joy to write, he takes his writing seriously, beginning each morning at an early hour and working to write ten pages each day. Once a story is outlined and written, Myers begins the task of rewriting his work, which he claims to be more fun than the original writing process. Myers strives to bring a "language of values" to his work, attempting to reach his readers through the reality of his characters.

Heady Days at Stuyvesant High—The Garment Center

Walter starts high school and Pap, Walter’s grandfather, comes to live at their house because of his poor eyesight. Financial strain causes his family to suffer. Walter’s mother becomes depressed and begins playing the lottery and drinking. Walter grows disinterested in school although he continues to write. He continues to worry that his skin color could relegate him to a life of struggle despite his intelligence and goodness. In addition, Walter sees his hopes dashed twice—once as the Dodgers lose the pennant and again as his mother gambles away the money he was saving for a typewriter.

Vocabulary	
accumulate	
opaque	
mortified	
subordinates	
ally	
tenuous	
decrepit	
dejected	
ostracized	
reinforced	
immerse	

Discussion Questions

1. Walter describes what it meant to be poor when he was a child. Compare and contrast the definition of “poor” when he was a child with what our culture considers “poor” today. Then discuss how you define the term. *(In Walter’s youth, poor families had no place to live, could not afford to eat, or could not afford to keep the family clothed. The measure of wealth had more to do with basic everyday living than with accumulating “things.” Answers will vary.)*
2. Discuss Herbert’s decision to bring Pap to live with the family in Harlem. What are the pros and cons of this decision? Consider points of view that Walter may have left out or been unaware of due to his age at the time. *(Answers will vary. The book shows most of the negatives—Pap taking Walter’s room, Mama being upset by Pap’s treatment of women and unconventional hygiene, the stress Walter’s father experiences personally and professionally, the extra money required to take care of a fourth person in the house, etc. Pros may include that adding one person to an existing household is likely less expensive than helping to fund a separate life somewhere else. Also consider Herbert’s desire to care for his own father instead of leaving the task to someone else. He may be fulfilling what he sees as a familial obligation or a desire to honor Pap in his old age.)*
3. Why do you think Walter takes the Dodgers’ loss so seriously? *(Answers will vary, but it seems that Walter is projecting his hopes for his own life onto the Dodgers [a number of whom were African Americans, Jackie Robinson being the first in major league baseball]. He tends to look at life in terms of “winning” and “losing,” and the stress he is experiencing at home and at school have likely left him feeling like he is “losing.” On some level, the Dodgers’ struggles become his own and vice versa. He hopes that the Dodgers will win not just because he likes them but because through them he may vicariously experience success during a frustrating time in his life.)*
4. Discuss how Walter’s thoughts on race relations change in this section. *(Answers will vary. Walter is frustrated because he feels that his parents have not given him the tools he needs to successfully coexist with whites. He used to think that intelligence and goodness could help a person transcend race, but as he grows older, he finds himself letting go of that belief. In the garment district, for example, he is demoted from packing to delivering goods with a hand truck. A white person takes his former job. Walter feels that no matter how good or intelligent he is, he will always be judged first on the color of his skin instead of the capacity of his mind or the goodness of his deeds.)*

5. The author presents black colleges as institutions that reinforce the concepts of “racial confidence” and “voluntary segregation” (p. 119). Discuss the pros and cons of these two ideas, considering how they affect all races. Do you agree or disagree with the author’s argument? *(Answers will vary. Pros may include how races that have suffered discrimination and were taught that their race is inferior can benefit from a place of learning that nurtures a sense of value and dignity. Cons may include how “voluntary segregation” can make it even harder for an alienated group to be accepted by society as a whole because the people in that group seem content to exist separately.)*
6. Walter’s mother spends the money he was saving, and he cannot buy the typewriter he wants. How does this event affect Walter’s life? How does it affect his mother and father? *(Answers will vary. Walter feels betrayed and upset that he cannot buy a typewriter. He is even unable to accept his father’s gift of a used typewriter because he is so hurt by his mother’s indiscretion. His mother becomes more depressed, and her drinking increases. His father once again feels unable to connect with Walter and likely blames himself for the family’s impoverished circumstances and unhappiness.)*
7. **Prediction:** Will Walter attend school again?

Supplementary Activities

1. Sports/Writing: Research Jackie Robinson and the Brooklyn Dodgers. Write a short essay describing Robinson’s historic effect on baseball.
2. Social Studies: Walter’s aunt arranges marriages between immigrants and American citizens for a fee. This allows the immigrants to apply to become United States citizens. Research the general requirements that exist today for an immigrant to become a legal United States citizen. Present your findings to the class using at least one visual aid.

Characterization

Directions: In each oval, write an adjective that describes Walter's personality. Then fill in each dotted rectangle with a detail about Walter that illustrates that part of his personality.

