

Teacher Guide

Grades 9–12

# Monster

Walter Dean Myers

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# MONSTER

by  
Walter Dean Myers

## Teacher Guide

Written by  
Pat Watson

### Note

The hardcover edition of this book, published by HarperCollins Publishers, ©1999, was used to prepare this guide. The page references may differ in other editions.

**Please note:** Parts of this novel deal with sensitive, mature issues. Please assess the appropriateness of this book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading and discussing it with your class.

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## Skills and Strategies

### Writing

Essay, script, newspaper article,  
poetry, letter

### Comprehension

Cause/effect, predicting

### Listening/Speaking

Discussion

### Vocabulary

Target words, definitions,  
application

### Across the Curriculum

Art—caricatures, sketch,  
painting, photography, collage;  
Drama—monologue, acting  
Geography; Music; Film

### Literary Elements

Characterization, metaphor,  
theme, plot development,  
irony, universality, analogy

### Thinking

Research, compare/contrast,  
analysis, critical thinking

## Thematic Analysis

**Directions:** Choose a theme from the book to be the focus of your word map. Complete a web and then answer the question in each starred box.

★ What is the author's main message?

★ What did you learn from the book?

## Pages 45-58

Steve's journal entry reflects on his hatred and fear of jail. The prosecution presents more incriminating testimony.

### Vocabulary

drawl (50)                      pertinent (55)                      silhouette (57)

### Discussion Questions

1. Characterize Bolden by noting the crimes he has committed. Discuss the impact of his testimony. Ask students to analyze how they would feel if he were testifying either for or against them. *(He has been arrested for breaking and entering, possession of drugs with intent to sell, and assault. He has testified that Evans sold him cigarettes and told him he got them during a drugstore robbery. pp. 47-49, 52-55)*
2. Examine the purposes of the flashbacks on pages 47-51 and page 58. *(establishes acquaintance of King and Steve and alludes to robbing a drugstore; reveals facts about Steve's home including a clean, neatly furnished house and a good relationship with his younger brother, Jerry; shows Steve as a person in control of the courtroom.)*

### Complementary Activities

1. Place Bolden's statement, "I just wanted to do the right thing. You know, like a good citizen." on the board. Analyze the irony of his statement as it compares with his actions. Have students complete the statement, "Being a good citizen means..."
2. Ask for a student volunteer to sketch the courtroom scene.

## Pages 59-88

More details about the murder scene unfold. Steve expresses feelings of "total loss" in jail. Testimony continues in the next scene.

### Vocabulary

affidavit (66)                      pans (67)                      grotesque (68)                      pessimist (73)  
 lethal (73)                      grimaces (73)                      perpetrator (74)                      proposition (83)  
 juvenile (86)                      civil (88)

### Discussion Questions

1. Examine Steve's "loss of identity" while in jail. *(taking away his jacket and belt, feelings of separation from real self in courtroom and of being one of many in jail, feeling that everyone looks the same, feeling of being less than human, dream where no one hears or answers him all make him feel that he is nothing. pp. 59-64)*

- Analyze Steve's flashback of his interrogation by Detectives Karyl and Williams. (*Karyl accuses Steve of the murder; Steve denies any part in the robbery. The conversation between the two detectives, as they discuss the death penalty, is designed to manipulate Steve into a confession. Steve, filled with fear, imagines himself on death row as they prepare him for a lethal injection. pp. 71-73*)
- Discuss the rationale of the older prisoner when Steve proclaims his innocence. (*He believes Steve is guilty, but even if he is innocent, somebody has to go some time in prison to pay for the crime. pp. 76-77*)
- Discuss why O'Brien says the trial could be going better and what she believes they must do. (*Nothing is happening to prove Steve's innocence. She thinks half the jurors believed he was guilty when they first saw him because he's young, Black, and on trial. She must show that the prosecutor is not being out to him. pp. 78-79*)
- Contrast Steve's flashback of Osvaldo Cruz with Cruz's appearance in court. Discuss the impact of Cruz's testimony. (*Flashback: Cruz acts tough and taunts Steve; Freddy advises Steve to leave him alone because he hangs out with bad dudes." Courtroom: speaks softly and timidly; says he went along with plans for the robbery because he was afraid of Bobo, James King, and James Harmon. pp. 80-87*)

### Supplementary Activities

- Place the maxim "innocent until proven guilty" on the board. Discuss whether or not students think it's true.
- Read the cliché "If you run with dogs, you get fleas." Have students associate this with Steve's predicament.
- Have a student draw a caricature of Cruz based on his description on page 80.

### Pages 89-113

Steve is tormented by thoughts of a prison term, his home, and the Nesbitt's death. Osvaldo Cruz testifies against Bobo and Steve. O'Brien's cross-examination screws Cruz. Steve's visit with his father provides the emotional ending for this section.

### Vocabulary

judicial (97) apprehended (102) ruffled (107) hexagon (110)  
 cope (111)

### Discussion Questions

- Analyze Steve's journal entry. (*Steve is discouraged because O'Brien feels the case is not going well. Hearing the prisoners discuss their crimes and jail sentences causes him to reflect on the possibility of his own jail term. The guards' taunts torment him, and the death photos of Nesbitt haunt him. Fear overshadows all the images. pp. 89-98*)