



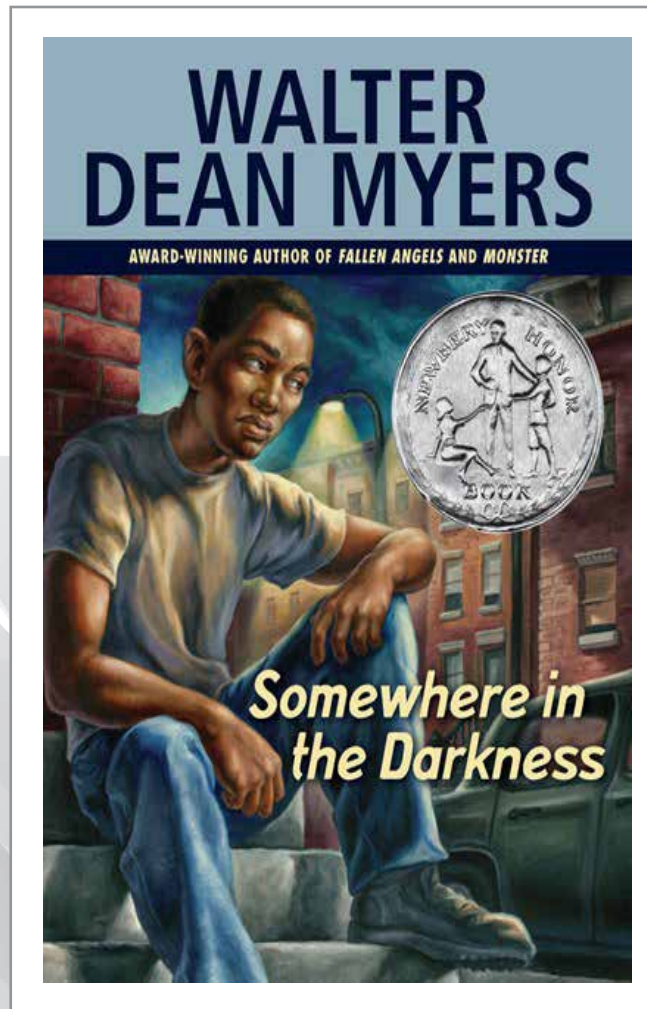
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Somewhere in the Darkness

Walter Dean Myers



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Somewhere in the Darkness

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!

ISBN 978-1-50204-195-1

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Skills and Strategies

Critical Thinking

Main idea/supporting details,
compare/contrast,
summarizing

Literary Elements

Character analysis, author's
purpose, story maps,
figurative language,
symbolism

Comprehension

Predicting, cause/effect,
sequencing, drawing
conclusions, conflict

Vocabulary

Context clues, parts of
speech, word usage, dialect

Writing

Journal, personal writing,
persuasive writing, poetry

Across the Curriculum

Geography—map skills,
research; Math—mileage
calculation; Drama—
reenactment; Art—
illustration; Health—kidney
disease; Social Studies—
family roles; History—
segregation

Genre: young adult fiction

Setting: New York City, New York; Chicago, Illinois; Marion, Arkansas; various locations in between

Point of View: third person

Themes: self-discovery; loss; importance of and longing for family bonds; search for redemption; forgiveness; dreams (realized or otherwise); race/ethnicity

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

Tone: serious, gritty, bittersweet yet hopeful

Summary

Fourteen-year-old Jimmy, who lives in New York City with his foster mother, Mama Jean, struggles with truancy and other teenage problems. One day his father, newly escaped from prison and dying of a kidney ailment, arrives unexpectedly to take Jimmy on a cross-country road trip. Because his mother died when he was an infant and his father, Crab, has been incarcerated, Jimmy has never learned about his roots. He is initially scared of his father, but he soon opens his heart, and the journey is one of self-discovery for both father and son. Jimmy comes to believe that his father was falsely accused of murder but sees that Crab is entangled in his illegal ways. In the end, Crab is betrayed by an ex-partner in crime; he is captured by the police and cuffed to a hospital bed, dying, with his son nearby. Throughout the novel, both characters learn about forgiveness. Jimmy transforms from a lost teenager, bright but unfocused, into an insightful young adult who realizes what it means to be a good father.

About the Author

Walter Dean Myers was born in West Virginia during the Great Depression but grew up as a foster child in Harlem, New York. Because of his own problems in school, including having a speech impediment and experiencing bullying, he writes insightfully about teenagers with difficulties. He wrote his first book, *Where Does the Day Go?*, for a contest for black writers of children's books. In all, the prolific Myers has written over 70 books. A well-respected author, his novel *Monster* was the first winner of the American Library Association's Michael L. Printz Award for young adult literature and was a National Book Award Finalist. He has also received the Coretta Scott King Award numerous times, and two of his books were awarded Newbery Honors. Myers also writes nonfiction, poetry, picture books, and plays. He currently lives with his family in New Jersey.

Characters

Jimmy Little: main character; 14-year-old boy who travels from New York to Arkansas with his estranged father

Crab Little: Jimmy's father who has recently escaped from prison

Mama Jean: Jimmy's foster mother who has raised him from early childhood

Mavis: old friend of Crab's in Chicago

Frank: Mavis' 16-year-old son; physically assertive and aggressive

Pages 104–140

Jimmy and Crab travel to Arkansas looking for Rydell, Crab's former partner in crime. Crab also seeks "the conjure man," a healer whom Crab believes is as good as a doctor. As Crab's pain increases, he tells Jimmy what he knows about life. He shares insight about past segregation in the South and about why people from rural areas move to big cities. They arrive in the town of Marion and visit High John, the conjure man who examines Crab.

Vocabulary

distinguish
semidarkness
stoop-shouldered
conjure
whispery
metallic
wincing
segregation
accusation
cypress
enamel
improbably
sassafras
eerie
tinny
annoyance

Discussion Questions

1. Why is Crab having difficulties moving? What does his decision to "walk it out" say about him? (*His pain is becoming more taxing. His choice to ignore the pain indicates he is either a very tough individual or that he is in denial about the consequences of his untreated condition.*)
2. Does Crab think he will be freed from prison if Rydell tells the truth? (*He thinks he will be dead before the paperwork is finished.*)
3. What is the "white section" of town? What does its existence indicate about the community? (*The town gives a glimpse of past racial segregation and its resulting economic imbalance, as the developed white section is where white people live apart from blacks.*)
4. What does Crab do when Jimmy asks probing questions? (*He changes the subject.*)
5. What does Crab say a conjure man can do? (*He can make you better, as a doctor would when treating a patient.*)
6. What does Jimmy show to Crab before going into the store? What does Jimmy's revelation say about their relationship at this point in the novel? (*He takes out Mama Jean's money and shows it to Crab. This action shows that Jimmy no longer needs a "safety net" to get him back to Mama Jean and that he cares about Crab.*)
7. What does Jimmy do inside the store? (*He buys groceries and then calls Mama Jean.*)
8. How are Jimmy's feelings toward Crab changing? What has caused this change? (*He is beginning to like Crab. He does not believe that Crab intends to harm him, and he probably feels sympathy because of Crab's illness.*)
9. What is segregation? (*It is a system in which people are divided into groups depending on skin color, and preferential treatment is given to one group. Racial segregation can affect daily life through separation in restaurants and schools and limit opportunities for renting or purchasing a home, etc. Segregation can exist due to laws or social norms and can contribute to economic imbalance between races.*)
10. Why does the police officer follow Crab's car? (*He is suspicious of strangers.*)
11. What does Crab mean when he says, "You either build something or listen to the cities calling you" (p. 124)? (*People either put down roots or move on to big cities where there is more excitement and more opportunities to make money.*)
12. How does the conjure man say he is different from doctors in the clinics? (*He knows that patients have souls. Doctors at the city clinic do not care if their patients live or die.*)

13. What relationship between parents and children does High John describe? How does this apply to Crab and Jimmy's situation? (*Fathers find peace in their sons, and mothers find life in their daughters. Crab seeks to make peace with Jimmy and thereby gain peace for himself.*)
14. Why is High John's quilt special? (*It was made before the Civil War and is something beautiful from a time marked by hardship.*)
15. What kind of physical procedure does High John perform? (*It seems to be some sort of acupressure.*)
16. Why does it upset Jimmy to hear Crab cry in his sleep? (*Jimmy has never thought about a man crying; he has always thought that a man would be able to handle any situation with strength. Crab still seems to be locked in a cell of darkness, and Jimmy feels sorry for his father.*)

Supplementary Activities

1. History: In a small group, research the history of segregation in the South, choosing topics such as education, daily life, and desegregation. Summarize your findings in a television news report, and present it to the class.
2. Social Influences: After reading about Crab's childhood, write about the effect his upbringing has had on him as an adult.
3. Illustration: Search this section of the novel for examples of descriptive language relating to the towns and cities Crab and Jimmy drive through. Illustrate one locale based on a particular description.
4. Characterization: Complete the Characterization web on page 23 of this guide for Mama Jean.

Character Analysis Blocks

Directions: Describe Crab using the blocks below.

<i>Who is the character?</i>			
<i>What does the character do?</i>		<i>Why does he do it?</i>	
<i>What, if anything, is significant about the character's name?</i>	<i>What is the nature of this character's actions? (reactive, active, important, consequential, secondary)</i>	<i>What is the significance of the book's time and place to the character?</i>	
<i>What is unusual or important about the character?</i>	<i>How does the character change in the story?</i>	<i>Does the character remind you of another character from another book? Who?</i>	<i>Do you know anyone similar to this character?</i>