

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

Fallen Angels

by Walter Dean Myers

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Pre-Reading

1. Think about the Vietnam War for a few minutes. Then, make a list of at least 10 words or phrases that you associate with the Vietnam War.
2. Do some research about the country of Vietnam, focusing on one of the following topics:

Religion

Foods

Arts (music, dance, painting, sculpture, etc.)

Family Life

Agriculture

Population

Means of Government

Then, write a brief essay about that aspect of Vietnamese culture. For example, what role does religion play in the everyday life of Vietnamese people? What size is the typical Vietnamese family? Remember you only have to choose one topic; do not write a separate essay for each topic.

3. You may have heard some people say that there was no reason for the United States to become involved in the Vietnam War. If you haven't already found the answer in your previous research, look for some more information concerning why the U.S. joined the war in Vietnam. Then write a short essay of no fewer than three paragraphs that explains the United States' involvement in the war.

Chapter 1

4. On the plane, Judy tells Perry that she and the other nurses will be going to Chu Lai. Perry asks, “Where’s Chu Lai?” Judy replies, “Who knows?” It’s apparent that most, if not all, of the new troops on the plane will be going into a situation about which they know very little. In fact, they don’t even know where they will be living in Vietnam.

Sometimes, it’s scary to go to a new and unknown place. Have you ever experienced something like this, maybe moving to a new house or starting a new school? In a letter to Judy, describe a time when you faced going into the unknown. How did your experience make you feel? Did things for you turn out to be better or worse than you expected?

5. Perry already has the feeling that he’s going to like peewee. After reading the first chapter, how do you feel about peewee? Do you think you’re going to like him as a character? Explain why or why not.
6. At the end of this chapter, Perry says that he “put Peewee in the letter to Mama.” As Perry, write a letter to Mama, telling her about your safe arrival in Vietnam. Be sure to include information about Peewee. A good way to start may be

September 15, 1967
Dear Mama,

I arrived here in Vietnam today. The weather is hot, but I’ve already met some interesting people...

Chapter 2

7. One of Perry's heroes, or at least a person who has been an inspiration to him, is the writer James Baldwin. Perry says that his dream is "to go to college and write like James Baldwin." If you could do something just as well as a celebrity, which celebrity would you choose? In a paragraph or two, explain why you would like to have the talent that person has.
8. Rings, who is African-American, says he "can't trust no whitey to watch [his] back" in a battle. He thinks that all of the African-American soldiers should stick together and protect themselves.

In your opinion, should people of different races and cultures separate themselves from those of other races and cultures? Do you agree with Rings, for example, that African-Americans can only trust others of their own race, or do you agree with Peewee, who thinks that Rings is "crazy"? Do you believe that race should have anything to do with how much we trust someone? Write an article for the opinion section of a newspaper in which you express your views about race relations. Be sure to completely support your opinion.

Chapter 3

9. The night before Perry and the other soldiers leave for Alpha Company, they stay in Chu Lai. Perry tells us that on that night, "Johnson slept naked...Peewee lay on his back, arms and legs spread, eyes not completely closed [, and] Jenkins had his head under the blanket."

In an e-mail to a classmate, explain what we can tell about Johnson, Peewee, and Jenkins just by the way each of them slept. For example, what can we assume about Peewee, knowing that he sleeps with his eyes partially open? Why would Jenkins have his head under the blanket? Be sure to explain how you arrived your conclusions in the body of the email.

Response Journal

10. Perry says that Peewee “agitates” Johnson. Perry has already warned Peewee to leave Johnson alone because Johnson is so big and tough.

What advice would you give Peewee about his relationship with Johnson? Write a letter to Peewee in which you advise him on how to deal with Johnson.

11. One of Perry’s teachers at Stuyvesant High School told him that he was “just an observer in life.” Do you consider yourself another “observer of life,” or are you a more active participant in life? If given a choice, would you like to stand back and watch something happen, or would you rather be a part of the action? In at least two paragraphs, explain whether you consider yourself an observer of life or a participant in life. Make sure you use specific examples to support your ideas.
12. Perry’s English teacher, Mrs. Liebow, says that “not giving in” is what “separate[s] heroes from humans.” Think, for a moment, about your own definition of a hero. What, in your opinion, does it take to be a hero? What characteristics does a hero have? How is a hero different from other people? In a well-formed paragraph, explain what you think it means to be a hero.
13. We get very little information about what Perry looks like. Draw a picture of him. Then, write a paragraph describing Perry’s physical attributes and why you think he looks the way you have drawn him.

Chapter 4

14. Imagine that you are a writer for the newspaper in Jenkins' hometown. Write a news story for the local paper in which you recount Jenkins' death.
15. Perry considers himself "a middle-of-the-road kind of guy, not too brave, but not too scared, either." If you were in Perry's situation, do you think you would be brave, scared, or "middle-of-the-road"? Explain your answer in a paragraph or two.
16. Instead of saying that Jenkins was killed, Perry says that Jenkins "got it." We often use euphemisms like this to help us deal with the reality of events that may otherwise be too difficult to bear. For example, it softens the idea if we say a man "passed away" instead of saying that he died. Make a list of at least 10 common euphemisms and their meanings.

Chapter 5

17. By now, you have learned a little bit about each member of Perry's squad. Of all of the men in the squad, whom do you think you'd most want to be friends with? Write a well-constructed paragraph in which you include the reasons why you would like to be friends with him.
18. Perry says that he wants to know how it feels "to shoot at a Cong." Imagine that you are one of the more experienced soldiers. Make a list of what you would tell Perry in answer to his question.