

**Reflections:**

*A Student Response Journal for...*

# *Monster*

*by Walter Dean Myers*

written by Lisa Burris

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Item No. 201326

## **Introduction**

1. You've probably heard the phrase "you can't judge a book by its cover." Before you begin to read this book or even turn it over, examine its front cover. Using only the front cover of *Monster* as a basis, write a short paragraph that explains what you think is the subject matter of this book.
2. We don't yet know the name of the narrator of this book, but in the introduction, he tells us that his story is "about being alone when you are not really alone." In other words, his story is about feeling alone, even when you are around lots of other people. All of us have probably felt like that at one time or another. This is a common feeling most people have, even those you would think never feel left out or alone.

In a short, two-paragraph essay, describe a time when you were in a group of people, yet felt like you were alone.

3. The narrator says that he thinks of his life like a movie. If you were making a movie of your life, which actors would you choose to play yourself, your parents, and a few relatives and friends?

Make a three-column list. In the first column, list the people you want to be in the movie; in the second column, list the actor you want to play each character; and in the third column, write a sentence explaining why each actor would do a good job portraying each person.

## **Monday, July 6<sup>th</sup>**

4. You've probably noticed that this novel is written mostly as a film script. This is probably different from the novels that you're used to reading, since most novels are written in paragraph form.

Select a scene from this section of the book and rewrite it in the more familiar paragraph form.

5. Steve Harmon is the book's narrator. He is sixteen years old, and he is on trial for murder. As he enters the courtroom for the first time, he is obviously scared.

Write an e-mail to Steve, calming his fears about facing his trial.

6. Kathy O'Brien is Steve's defense attorney. It is her job to prove that Steve was not involved in the murder of which he is accused. O'Brien says that "[her] job is to make sure the law works for [Steve] as well as against [him]." This seems like an impossible job.

Write a dialogue between yourself and a classmate, discussing what O'Brien means when she says that she is working both for Steve and against him. You might begin like this:

**Classmate:** I don't get it. How can Steve's lawyer work for him and against him at the same time?

**You:** Well, I think what she really means is...

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## Monster

7. As he sits in court, Steve scribbles words into a notebook. When O'Brien asks him what he's doing, he says that "[he's] writing [his experiences] down as a movie." In fact, what we're reading is the movie script that Steve is writing.

Take an event that has happened to you today and write it in the form of a movie script, just the way Steve does. Here is a sample; you may use something similar to this or create your own:

### Scene I

*Interior: A darkened bedroom. There are posters on the wall, mostly depicting sports figures and rock stars. Dirty clothes are scattered around the floor. The camera moves in on a body-sized lump on the top of a bed. From this angle, it's impossible to tell if the lump is a person or just the wadded-up bedclothes. Suddenly, an alarm bell rings.*

**Me:** Arrrggghhh! What? I just got to sleep.

*A voice calls from outside the bedroom door.*

**Unseen person:** Are you getting up today, or what?

**Me:** Okay, okay. Give me a break. I just...

8. Steve goes into a short, but very specific description of the characters as they are introduced. For example, the judge is "tall and thin...[with] wispy white hair." He is also "60 years old [, and he] already looks bored." Through this description, we get a pretty accurate portrayal of the judge. We know that he is older, his hair is thinning, and because he looks bored, he's probably not very interested in the trial.

Imagine that you are a character in *Monster*. Write a detailed paragraph in which you describe yourself as Steve would describe you. Remember that Steve's descriptions include both physical and personality traits.

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*Response Journal*

9. As an icebreaker, something to lighten the mood in the courtroom, the judge asks the lawyers how they enjoyed their Fourth of July holiday. Asa Briggs, the lead attorney for the defense of James King, makes a good natured comment about going to a barbecue and playing baseball, but Kathy O'Brien says that "with all of the fireworks, [the Fourth of July] is [her] least favorite holiday."

Think about the holiday that is your *least* favorite. Write a list of at least 10 things that you dislike about that holiday. Then, using at least four of the things you hate about it, write a poem that explains how horrible that holiday is. Keep in mind that not all poems have to rhyme.

10. Before the trial begins, the action cuts to a flashback, something that happened earlier, when Steve was sitting in a film workshop at his high school. In this scene, he and his film teacher, Mr. Sawicki, debate whether a film the group just watched was any good.

Whether a movie is "good" depends largely on the person who is watching it. Not every film appeals to all people. As a reporter for your school newspaper, write a short review of a movie you have seen recently. Your review should tell your readers whether you liked the film overall, as well as specific things you liked or disliked about it. Include whether you'd recommend that other people see the movie.

Through Ms. Petrocelli's speech, her opening argument in the trial, we get a viewpoint of the case to be tried and the people who are involved in it. Using this information as a basis, write a news story about the trial that could be used on a newspaper website. Newspaper articles try to say everything quickly, and the writers try to put it all in the first paragraph. After that, the writers can expand and supply extra details, but in the first paragraph, they include **who**, **what**, **when**, **where**, **how** and sometimes **why**. See if you can include these elements in your first paragraph, then expand on the information in the rest of your story.

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*Monster*

11. The title of this book comes from what Steve is called in court: he is labeled a “monster.”

If you could choose one word to describe yourself, which word would you choose? Select the one word that best describes you and, in a well-constructed paragraph, explain why that word really expresses your personality. Some examples of one-word descriptions are: happy, anxious, friend, confident, etc.

12. In her opening statement, O’Brien says that “the law that protects society protects all of society,” those who are the victims as well as those who have committed the crime.

Write an opinion letter to your local congressperson, stating whether you think that our court system is fair to everyone. You may choose to begin like this

February 15<sup>th</sup>

Congresswoman Jones,

I live in your district, and I would like to take a moment to explain to you my views on our legal system. Some people argue that our justice system is unfair. My belief is that...