

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

Scorpions

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Scorpions

CHAPTER ONE

1. Jamal searches out the window for a glimpse of his Mama. She has been visiting his older brother Randy in prison. The following excerpt describes what Jamal sees as he looks out the window.

Jamal watched as the man leaned slowly toward the ground, then straightened up. Jamal knew that the addict would repeat his nodding until he fell asleep.

This brief description of the addict gives the reader an understanding of Jamal's neighborhood. The reader knows that seeing an addict on the street is a normal part of Jamal's life.

Imagine that you are looking out of a window of your home watching for a member of your family to return. In two or three sentences, describe one aspect of your neighborhood that you can see from the window that might help a reader gain an understanding of your neighborhood.

2. Jamal fantasizes about getting a job one day and earning enough money to purchase a video recorder for Mama. Suppose you were working and earning money. Would it occur to you to buy a special gift for your parents? Why or why not? If so what would it be? In one or two paragraphs describe the item, state why you would purchase it, and discuss how you imagine it would feel to present the gift.
3. In the following excerpt, Jamal daydreams about what it will be like to see Randy again after Randy serves seven years in prison.

They might even be the same size, Jamal thought. He might even have a mustache by then.

Think about one of your siblings or a close relative that you see regularly. Picture in your mind what that person might look like, and act like, if you suddenly met them again after being separated for seven years. Then, write two paragraphs. In the first paragraph describe the changes you might see in that person. In the second paragraph describe the changes that person might see in you.

CHAPTER TWO

4. In this chapter Jamal describes a typical morning in his home. First, Jamal suffers through a cold shower. Then, because there are no eggs, he has only toast for breakfast. Sassy walks around half-asleep.

In one or two paragraphs, describe a typical morning in your home. Provide enough specific details so that the reader gains a thorough impression.

5. In the following passage Jamal describes Mama's voice.

There was something about Mama's voice, something that made her sound tired even though the day was just starting.

What is he saying about Mama's voice? Complete the following dialogue between Jamal and Mama discussing her voice, to explain why her voice sounds tired.

Jamal: Why your voice sound tired all the time?

Mama: What you talking about?

Jamal: Your voice. The way you sound, like you tired all the time.

Mama: Lord knows I'm tired. It seems...

6. During Mama's last visit to the prison, Randy sends a message to Jamal. He wants Jamal to meet with Mack, who is Randy's friend and a member of the Scorpions. Randy wants Mack to tell Jamal "who to look out for in the Scorpions." Mama is not sure she wants twelve-year-old Jamal to have contact with Mack, but she is also worried about Jamal's safety on the streets. She finally decides that Jamal should meet with Mack.

As Mama, write a letter to your best friend. In the letter, discuss your fears about letting Jamal meet with Mack and your reasons for approving the meeting.

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CHAPTER THREE

7. When Jamal is late to class, he is sent to the principal's office where Mr. Davidson gives him a lecture on tardiness. As part of the lecture, Mr. Davidson says,

"I would ask you to bring your mother to school, but she probably doesn't care any more about your education than you do."

What do you think of Mr. Davidson's comment? What assumption is he making about Jamal's mother? Is Mr. Davidson justified in making this comment?

Write a letter to Mr. Davidson expressing to him your opinion of his comment to Jamal. In the letter, tell Mr. Davidson how you think his words make Jamal feel.

8. Jamal refuses to go to Evans' store to buy food for lunch, and Sassy, who is hungry, threatens to tattle. After Jamal explains to her why he refuses to go, Sassy decides she is not hungry and agrees to play checkers with Jamal instead of eating lunch. As eight-year-old Sassy, write a diary entry discussing how it feels to go hungry and why you decided not to tattle.
9. After lunch, Jamal walks past Mr. Davidson in the school hall hoping that the principal will notice that he is returning to school on time. Jamal is disappointed when Mr. Davidson fails to praise him. Jamal thinks to himself,

That was what was wrong. When you did something wrong, everybody put their mouth on you. Then when you did something good, everybody acted like it wasn't anything special.

Do you think Jamal deserves praise for returning to school on time? Why do you suppose Mr. Davidson does not comment on Jamal's positive behavior?

As Mr. Davidson, record you thoughts as Jamal is walking by.

Response Journal

10. Dwayne is an older boy who picks on and belittles Jamal in school. Dwayne makes Jamal “feel small inside.” In the last paragraph of this chapter, Jamal lists other things that make him feel small inside.

The guy at the furniture store who had yelled at Mama had made him feel that way. Teachers who made him stand up in class when he made a mistake or didn't have his homework. Big kids who laughed at him were the worst because there wasn't anything he could do to stop them. Not by himself, not while he was small and not as tough as they were.

Make a list of people and/or events from your experience that have made you feel “small inside.” In a paragraph, select one of those people or events and describe what it is that made you feel small, and how you dealt with the situation.

CHAPTER FOUR

11. Jamal wants to help paint the scenery for the school play, but Miss Brown assigns the artistic work to other students. Jamal is asked to open the windows to let fresh air in and then told he can leave. Jamal obeys Miss Brown, but he is disappointed. He likes to draw and wishes he was selected to work on the painting.

Why do you suppose Miss Brown does not give Jamal a chance to paint the scenery? Do you think it is because she does not know he likes to draw, or could there be another reason? Consider the impression Jamal makes on his teachers. What do they think of him?

As Miss Brown, record your personal thoughts during the selection process.

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12. Tito likes to wear Jamal's clothes. Jamal says to him,

"You always wearing my stuff." Jamal smiled. "You a funny dude."
"That's what brothers do," Tito said.

Tito shows his close friendship with Jamal by borrowing and wearing Jamal's clothes. Think about your relationship with your best friend. In one or two paragraphs write about the ways you show your friendship with each other.

13. Tito lives with Abuela, his Puerto Rican grandmother. Jamal asks Tito if he received a letter from his father in Puerto Rico. In the following passage, Tito explains to Jamal why Abuela does not think Tito needs to receive letters from his father.

"Abuela said it doesn't make any difference, because your grandmother is suppose to take care of you. She said in Puerto Rico everybody treats their grandparents like they were the real mother in the house. She said that your family is more important in Puerto Rico than here."

Think about your grandparents and the role they have in your life. How is Tito and Abuela's concept of family similar to or different from yours?

Diagram your family tree, to your great-grandparents, if possible. Select one of your grandparents or great-grandparents, and tell a story about an event that made you feel close to him or her.

14. When Jamal thinks back on the day Randy is sentenced to prison he feels "mad at Randy, real mad." However, Jamal keeps his anger to himself. He never tells Randy or his Mama how he feels. As Jamal, write a letter to Randy telling him why you are mad at him.