

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Slam!

by Walter Dean Myers

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Notes

Slam! is a coming of age story about a young, Africa-American, high school basketball player from Harlem, who must learn to compete in an academically challenging, mostly white, magnet school. Walter Dean Myers masterfully describes basketball action, and students in grades 7–9 will enjoy this fast-paced and upbeat sports story. Told in first person, the novel includes many slang phrases that add interest and believability to the narrative. Students can infer meanings of the slang terms from the text, so they do not add complexity to the story. To fully understand the basketball action, students should have a basic understanding of the game rules and terminology.

All references come from the Scholastic Edition of *Slam!*, copyright 1996.

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. define vocabulary words from the text, including basketball terms, to describe the action of the games.
2. deduce from the context the meanings of slang expressions.
3. identify instances of allusion in the story.
4. discuss the extent to which Slam is a reliable narrator.
5. recognize examples of similes and personification.
6. find sensory images that enhance the description of the setting.
7. discuss the title's significance to the story.
8. cite incidents that mark the text as a coming of age story for Slam.
9. identify instances of humor in the story and discuss how it helps to lighten the mood.
10. compare Slam and Ice and discuss the reasons why each takes a different path in life.
11. cite incidents from the story to illustrate the following themes:
 - To be successful, even as a player in the NBA, a person must have a good education.
 - To be a success in life, a person must believe he can succeed, find something he loves to do and then work hard to achieve his goals.
 - Good friends help each other to overcome difficulties and achieve positive goals.
 - Drugs have the power to destroy lives.
 - A supportive family unit helps a young person achieve his or her goals.
 - Unfair judgments of others must not discourage a person.
 - In basketball, as in life, a person must be a team player.
12. relate incidents that demonstrate the positive and negative impacts of growing up in Harlem on Slam's life.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Why is Slam attending Latimer instead of Carver? In what ways is Latimer different from Carver? How do you think he feels about his new school?
2. List three ways Ice's home life is different from Slam's home life. To what extent do you think Ice's family background contributes to his decision to sell drugs? What other factors may have influenced his decision?
3. Cite an incident from the story proving that Slam possesses each of the following character traits: loyalty, compassion, intelligence, drive, good listener, quick temper, respectful of the feelings of others, artistic, loving, self-confidence
4. Why is it important for Slam to improve his math skills?
5. Cite two incidents from the story to support each of the following themes.
 - Drugs, like crack cocaine, have the power to destroy lives.
 - A person must not allow himself to be discouraged by the unfair judgements and actions of others.
6. In the following conversation Slam is talking to Grandma Ellie in the hospital about the difficulties he experiences with his schoolwork at Latimer. How does Slam feel about his grandmother's advice?

"It's hard, ain't it, son?" Grandma Ellis put her hand on my shoulder.
"Yes, ma'am."
"Well, I just want to share this with you, baby," she said, softly. "I really don't care because it's not my life. And I'd bet two Roosevelt dimes that nobody else cares – maybe excepting your mama and that's cause she still thinks it's her job – because it ain't their lives. It's your life, do you care?"
"Yeah."
"Then deal with it."
7. What lessons about life can Slam learn from Nick?
8. Slam watches the tape of Carver's match with Trinity. What disturbs Slam about this game?
9. In what ways does Coach Nipper's behavior toward Slam change at the end of the story? What do you think happens to bring about this change?

Chapter Two

VOCABULARY

crosstown – located on the other side of a town or city
desperation – recklessness resulting from despair
stoop – a small platform with steps at the door of a house

1. Why is Slam attending Latimer instead of Carver High School?

2. How does Slam feel about his new school?

3. Told in the first person, the author uses many different techniques to add interest to Slam's descriptions of his surroundings. One of these techniques is to personify an object or an animal by giving it human characteristics. For example: *The pig laughed all the way to the barn.* Find an example of personification in this chapter.

4. For what reasons does Slam admire Ice? Why does he feel that he and Ice are growing apart, as they get older?

5. Ice wants to go shopping for a beeper. Why does Slam believe Ice wants a beeper?

Chapter Six

VOCABULARY

sienna – yellowish-brown

- 1. After winning the game with Regis, how do the other players treat Slam? How does the coach respond to Slam’s performance in the game?

- 2. Why do you think Slam kisses Kicky in the backseat of Ice’s car even though he is in love with Mtisha?

- 3. What evidence is there that Mtisha understands Slam’s love for basketball?

- 4. Describe Marjorie Flatley and the school project she and Slam are going to work on together.

Chapter Twelve

VOCABULARY

elevate – increase

- 1. How does Slam feel when Nick tells him a college basketball scout is coming to see Nick play?

- 2. Cite an incident from this chapter to prove the following statement. Nick is a team player who puts the welfare of the team above his own personal interests.

- 3. Why do Nick and the other members of the team refuse to shake hands with the Trinity players?

Chapter Eighteen

1. Miss Fowell compliments Slam on his videotape, but then she lectures him about keeping the rest of his life together. Slam asks her why adults lecture students. What is her reply?

2. List two positive incidents from this chapter that show that Slam is good in some areas of school.

3. For what reasons is the game against Carver important?
