

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

Slam!

by Walter Dean Myers

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Chapter One

1. Slam writes that the only time in his life that he feels “for real” is when he is playing basketball. When he is on the basketball court, he feels like he is in control of the situation and of his life. Can you understand how Slam feels about basketball? Write about a time in your life when you may have experienced a similar feeling of control.
2. Slam decides to give up the Art Club, but he wants to remain on the basketball team. Suppose you are in Slam’s position, and you must find a way to spend more time on your studies. What activity might you give up and why?
3. Coach Nipper does not like Slam’s attitude. He decides to teach Slam a lesson by challenging him to play a game of one-on-one. Slam quickly realizes that he can easily win the match, however, winning is not enough for him, and he antagonizes the Coach during the match. Slam writes,

“I knew that was going to tick him off, but he was out to diss me and it wasn’t going to happen. Not in this life.”

If you were Slam, how would you have handled the situation? Remember that the Coach is the person who will decide how much playing time Slam will get in the upcoming games.

Chapter Two

4. Slam's locker is right next to a boy named Ducky, and because of this, Ducky thinks he and Slam are friends. Slam does not dislike Ducky, but at this point in the story, he does not consider Ducky to be his good friend. Write about a similar situation from your life where someone you know imagines your relationship to be closer than you do.
5. Slam recently transferred from Carver, a school in Harlem, to Latimer, a magnet school that accepts students from all over New York City. Unfortunately, Slam is unprepared for the challenging academic classes at Latimer. He writes,

“When you have a lot of hard classes, one after the other, getting out of school at the end of the day is like getting out of a torture chamber or something. The streets in the South Bronx can look raggedy, but a day of classes when everybody knows what’s going on but you can make them look good.”

Slam is clearly happier away from school. Write a letter to Slam helping him to understand that staying in school and facing the challenging classes will benefit him later in life. If you can, give him some advice on how to pass these classes.
6. The principal of Latimer, Mr. Tate, is black. Jimmy, from the basketball team, is also black. However, Slam discovers that most of the other students and teachers at Latimer are white. Consider how you would feel if you were transferred to a school where the student and teacher population's race was largely different from your own. What advice might you give to Slam on how to fit in at Latimer?

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7. In the following excerpt, Slam describes his friendship with Ice:

“It was more the way we knew each other, the way we could be hanging on a corner and almost know what each other was thinking. We didn’t talk about what we had, but it was there. A friend thing, almost like a love thing. The only time it really came out, or almost came out, was when we were on the court together.”

Can you understand the depth of Slam’s feelings of friendship for Ice? Describe the ways you and your best friend express your friendship for each other.

8. Mtisha tells Slam that she suspects Ice is dealing drugs. Slam does not want to believe anything bad about Ice. He trusts Mtisha and knows that if she suspects Ice is dealing drugs that he should check it out. Suppose a friend you trust tells you that your closest buddy is involved with drugs. How would you handle the situation?

Chapter Three

9. Slam and his mother visit Grandma Ellie in the hospital. Grandma Ellie asks Slam about his studies. He tells her that he is having trouble in school, and she replies,

“Well, I just want to share this with you, baby, 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?”

Slam does not appreciate Grandma Ellie’s advice, but he is polite to her because she is a sick old woman. Why do you suppose Slam finds accepting her advice so difficult? Give some reasons why you think many teenagers ignore the advice of older, more experienced family members.

Chapter Four

10. Slam and Derek seem to have a good relationship. Write a conversation between Derek and one of his friends. In this conversation, have Derek tell his friend why he admires his big brother.
11. In this chapter, Slam leaves basketball practice because he believes the coach is treating him unfairly. Mr. Goldstein explains the coach's strategy in the following excerpt.

“He needs you [Slam] to concentrate on playing the kind of pattern ball that he thinks is going to help the team win. What's wrong with that?”

Write a dialogue between the coach and Slam. In this dialogue, have the coach calmly discuss his strategy with Slam. You must decide how you think Slam will react to the coach's words. What could the coach say to Slam that might persuade him to cooperate?

12. Karen asks Slam to pose for a picture. Even though he barely knows Karen, he begins to daydream about becoming a famous NBA player and marrying her. Why do you suppose that is?
13. At home, Slam thinks about Mr. Nipper and the miserable basketball practice. He writes,

“Where that put me was I had to either quit and give up what I was about, or go back and still play with the team and just give up my respect.”

Do you agree with Slam's assessment of his situation? Can you suggest to him a different alternative, one he may not have considered?

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Chapter Five

14. Slam is told to go to the school office. He immediately wonders if something has happened to Derek or his Grandma, so he runs down the stairs to the office. What would run through your mind if you were suddenly and unexpectedly called to the principal's office?
15. Slam finds Mr. Tate, Moms, and a black engineer named Mr. Randall all waiting for him in the principal's office. He is upset when Mr. Tate recommends that Mr. Randall tutor Slam in math. Slam writes,
- “I didn't need people talking about me like I was some kind of thing they was studying in science. A thing, and not even a person. They were talking about me like I was nothing. Ain't nobody wants to be nobody. Mess just made me feel like hitting something.”

In your opinion, did Mr. Tate handle the situation properly? In what way could Mr. Tate have offered to help Slam without making him feel worthless?

Chapter Six

16. After the game with Regis, everyone on the team, except for the coach, begins to call Greg by his nickname, Slam. Why do you think they do that? How does Slam feel about his nickname?
17. Ducky learns that five more students came to the gym and asked to join the team. He believes that now he will be kicked off the team. Slam writes,
- “It's funny the way some guys think they can just come out and play ball and don't work at it. And the way he walked away you could see he wasn't even going to try. He had it in his head that he wasn't going to make it.”

To what extent do you think Slam's observation about Ducky may also apply to his own life, specifically his problems with math?