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Professor Warner

English 112B- 01

07 October 2024

Monster

by Walter Dean Myers

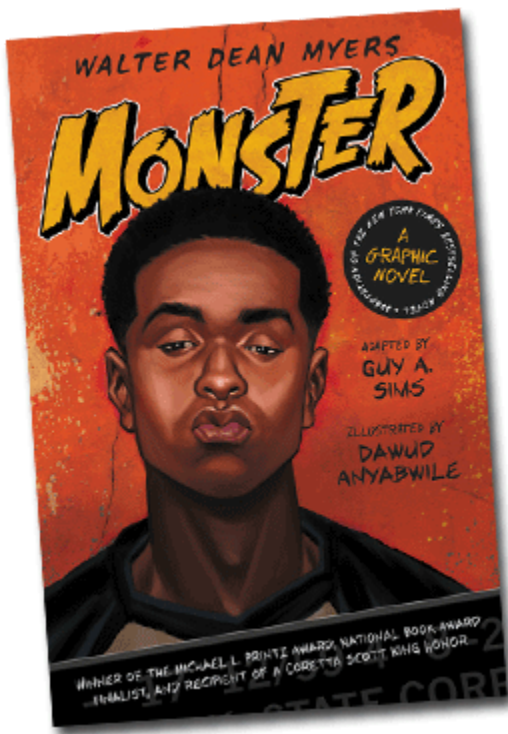


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<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/119268/monster-by-walter-dean-myers/>

About the Author

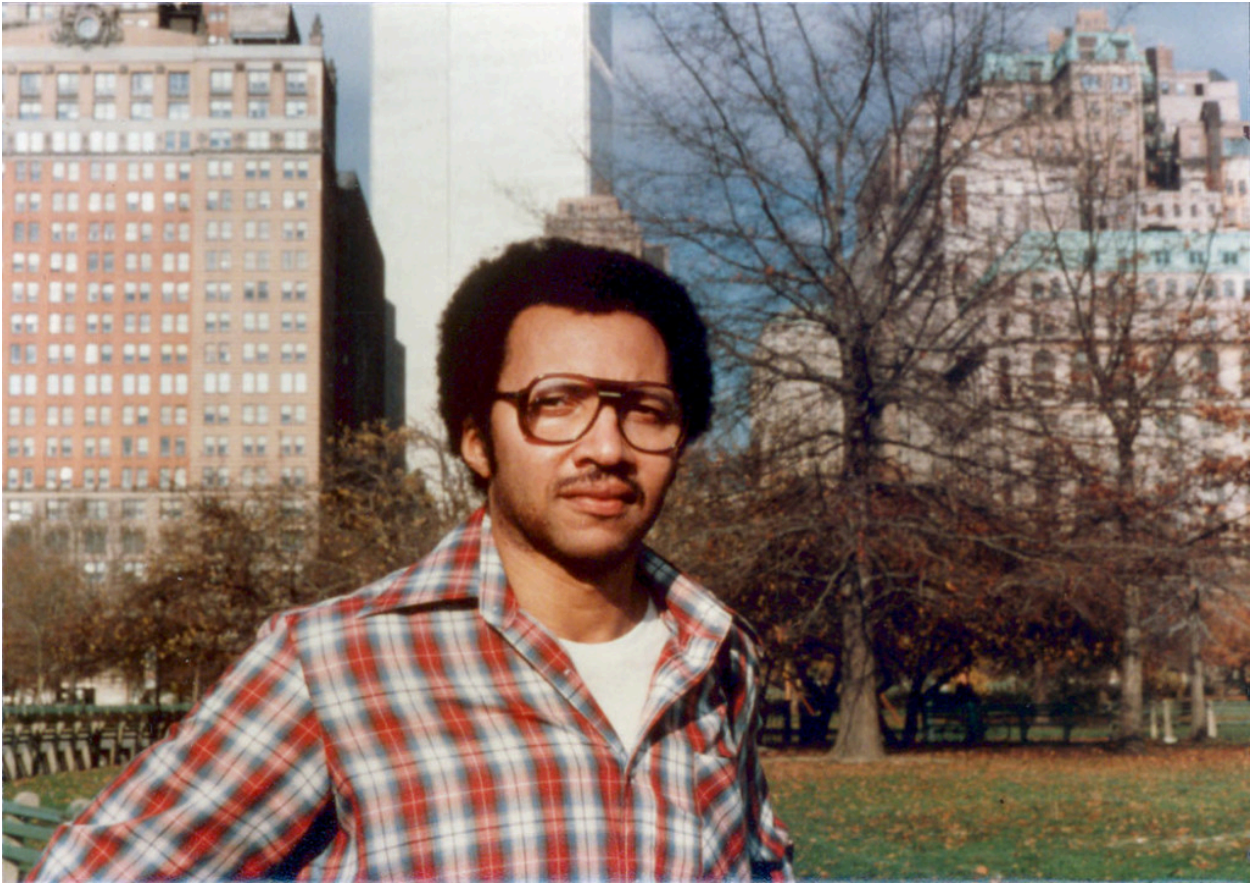


Photo source: <https://walterdeanmyers.net/>

Walter Dean Myers, originally known as Walter Milton Myers, was born on the 12th of August, 1937, in Martinsburg, West Virginia. His mother tragically passed away when Myers was two years old, which led him to become adopted. His newfound parents, Florence and Herbert Dean, raised Walter in Harlem, which was where Walter would spend most of his childhood. In high school, Walter found himself intrigued with reading and writing, to the point where he was encouraged to continue on that path. Despite that, Myers ended up dropping out of high school and enlisting in the military at the age of 17. Like most, he struggled in the military and found his way back to writing after his service. After that he continued writing as a passion

and career. An amazing quote from Myers is the following: “I write books for the troubled boy I once was, and for the boy who lives within me. It's what I do.” (Myers, Paragraph 6).

Author website: <https://walterdeanmyers.net/about/>

Book Summary

The book *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers, focuses on the trial and prosecution of Steve Harmon, a sixteen year old black male who has been accused of being an accomplice to a botched robbery that caused a death. As Steve waits for his trial, he begins to write journals about his experiences and anxieties that he faces throughout this entire process. His journals are all written in the format of a movie script and they highlight each experience that Steve is having like if it was his last. In the trial, Steve’s defending attorney, Kathy O’Brien, works towards emphasizing his innocence and having him be placed as far away from the crime as possible, even though she does not fully believe his innocence. The other suspects that were accused explain how Steve served as the lookout during the crime, but Steve’s attorney explains that the role is highly distinct from the role of “murderer” that they are trying to place on Steve. In the end, the judge finds Steve Harmon to not be guilty and he is acquitted.

Key Quotes

Quote #1

“The film will be the story of my life. No, not my life, but of this experience. I'll write it down in the notebook they let me keep. I'll call it what the lady who is the prosecutor called me.

Monster.” (4-5 this and all other quotations in this Book Talk are taken from *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers).

- This quote appears in the beginning of the book. During this time, Steve Harmon is in his jail cell waiting for the continuation of his trial. He is battling his newfound anxieties and contemplates what it is that got him in this present day environment. To try to keep himself busy and to uplift his spirits, he mentions how he could make these following experiences play out like if it was a movie, while also writing them down in the notebook in the same way. He ends his idea by stating that he would call it “monster” which was how the prosecutor called him and the others accused of killing a man in a failed robbery.
- This quote is very powerful because it shows the anxiousness and the dilemma that Steve Harmon is going through. This quote explains a thought process of a person who is going through the worst time of his life and is attempting to do anything they can to make it feel even a little bit better. In this case “making his life into a film” is his way of trying to make himself known as someone who is innocent. The title of the film being called “Monster” is the dilemma that he is trying to overcome, due to his accusations of being a killer, even though he was not the person who fired and killed the owner of the drug store. In a sense, he asks himself the following question: Is he really in here because he is a Monster ?

Quote #2

“Miss O’Brien looked at me, I didn’t see her looking at me but I knew she was. She wanted to know who I was. Who was Steve Harmon? I wanted to open my shirt and tell her to look into my heart to see who I really was, who the real Steve Harmon was.” (92).

- This quote is mentioned after one of the many trial sessions have concluded. As the Jury leaves, Miss O'Brien wants to go over the pictures of the fatally shot drugstore owner. She makes sure to spread out the pictures throughout the table and she turns to look at Steve, to see his reaction. Harmon notices this and that is where he internally mentions the quote.
- This quote is crucial to this story because it shows that even close connections or people meant to help you will also doubt you. To Steve, that is what Miss O'Brien is doing and that kills him because she is in that court to help prove his innocence. He wishes he could change her perspective but he is also thinking that he may be overreacting, and misinterpreting her actions.

Quote #3

“I want to look at myself a thousand times to look for one true image. When Miss O'Brien looked at me, after we had won the case, what did she see that caused her to turn away? What did she see?” (281).

- This quote takes place about five months after Steve has been declared innocent, he mentions that he continues making films because he has grown accustomed to that habit and does enjoy expressing his life through film, but he is still very restless because of what happened after he tried hugging Miss O'Brien, when he was cleared of his charges.
- This quote is mentioned to introduce the idea that not everyone will look at you the same when you have committed an error. In this case, it was pretty evident Miss O'Brien was not happy with the idea of defending Steve because she believes that he should have been found guilty as well since he was a part of the group, even if he was not the one who pulled the trigger and killed the man. She was not happy but it was her job to do so.

Sometimes in life, you can't change how people will view you, and I think for Steve Harmon, this took a huge toll on him. It did not make him feel normal, but instead it made him feel like a "monster" still.

Classroom Use

This book is very powerful, sad, and very sensitive for some readers, which is why I do not see many teachers incorporating this book into their classrooms. If I were to incorporate this book in my classroom, I would create a unit of study which would have topics like teenage juvenile errors and consequences as a main focus. Then I would ask for the students' opinion on the leniency that some teenagers receive when committing crimes. For homework assignments, students would look into songs or videos that showcase teenage actions/mistakes, and in class we would work on a cause/effect worksheet that students can fill out with their own ideas on what could be ok or what could go wrong. These activities would most likely be incorporated to bring some more awareness to the consequences of actions, because it becomes more complex when one becomes an adult.

Why should teenagers read *Monster* ?

I believe that teen students should be able to read *Monster* because it portrays moral questions that can be very beneficial in a classroom environment. In today's modern world, topics like racism, discrimination, and emotional trauma are very big and important, especially with teenagers who feel lost and unheard. This book provides a whole trial and prosecution based on the perspective of a teen, with emotions that every teen has at least felt throughout their lives. It would be harder to relate to for teens if Steve was an adult, but with him being a teenager,

students could potentially see themselves in Steve while asking themselves what they could do differently.

How it fits best in Chapters 4-8 in *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning*.

Chapter 4: “Books about Real-Life Experiences”

- This entire book focuses on a young teen who is terrified and fighting with his conscience because of an error. This sort of perspective can be applied to teens, and people in general who have committed mistakes before and they can relate to the frightening aspects of life and consequences.

Chapter 6: “Books about Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions”

- Steve Harmon full-heartedly believes that he is innocent. While he does struggle with his internal emotions, he is hoping to be given freedom towards the end. He notices that he is looked at differently because of the color of his skin, and even notices how the people in his own neighborhood talk about these incidents and call their own people names.
- In the 5 months after Steve won his trial, Steve struggles with getting accustomed to losing his fathers trust, losing the trust of his community, and even being seen as guilty through the eyes of Miss O’Brien. That is unfortunately something that he will have to live with due to his decisions.

Chapter 8: “Books on Allegory, Fantasy, Myth, and Parable”

- *Monster* can be seen as a parable that instills the idea of always doing positive and correct actions, or “if you can’t do the time, don’t do the crime.”
- Steve Harmon’s ending in which he contemplates the haunting look that Miss O’Brien gave him is a great example of the idea that once you are portrayed in a bad light, you will always be seen that way. It is better to not do actions that you will regret later.

Quantitative

Word Count: 28,647

Page Count: 288

Lexile Level: 670L, age range N/A.

Interest Level: Upper Grades 9-12

AR: ATOS Book Level: 4.92; AR Points: 10.

Dale-Chall: 5-6th grade level, age 10-11 and older.

Flesch-Kincaid: 5th grade level, age 10-11.

Qualitative

Structure:

- This book is presented through Steve Harmon's point of view.
- This book is written in fiction but some of the environments and ideas are real such as:
Racism, The two sides of the Justice System, and Harlem as an environment.

Language Conventions and Clarity:

- Most of the passage is written through a moving drama play form. The story is very clear when it switches to other characters.
- The vocabulary is very simple and easy to understand. The vocabulary chosen in Steve's examples portray him as a vulnerable character who has a teen mentality. It is clear to the audience that Steve's words are very simple but it's his way of expressing them that makes it impactful.
- All punctuation and grammar are used correctly.

Knowledge Demands:

- The book does provide most of the context of the story in the first 10-25 pages. Overall, the book is arranged in a way in which one is feeling the most pity for Steve Harmon even though he was a part of the crime he is being charged with. While he acknowledges that he did help scout the area, He also feigns ignorance which is something shown in the book for the readers.
- Even though this book is targeted towards teenagers, they will need to understand the inequality of the justice system, and also the discrimination that still occurs in courts all over the world to this day because of skin color.

Levels of Meaning:

- A major life lesson that is introduced in this book is the lesson that we all have our own issues going on in our lives, to always be worried about one person. One should not hang around with a bad crowd because it can lead to dire consequences, and most people will mourn for you or want to help out, but they will not always do so.
- Teens reading this book will hopefully understand the gravity and punishment that comes with crimes and with the actions of taking someone's life. If they have a choice to not do it, they should not. This book is a reminder of that choice.