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Scorpions
Walter Dean Myers



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Response Journal

To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

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 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 your thoughts as Jamal is walking by.

CHAPTER FIVE

15. Randy wants Jamal to take over as the leader of the Scorpions, so that he can get the money Randy needs to appeal his conviction. Jamal is worried about this plan because he is young and small. Mack reassures Jamal by promising to be his warlord and protect his back.

After the meeting with Mack, Tito asks Jamal what he is going to do, but Jamal does not have an answer. If you could talk to Jamal, what advice would you give to him?

Write a dialogue between yourself and Jamal. In the dialogue discuss the pros and cons of going along with Randy and Mack's plan.

The dialogue might begin as follows:

- You:** Jamal, don't you think you are too young and small to be the leader of the Scorpions?
Jamal: Mack will watch my back. Besides the Scorpions want young boys.
You: Why is that?
Jamal: Because the older boys have to testify in court if they get caught.
You: So you are considering the plan?
Jamal: I...

16. Tito says to Jamal,

"Jamal, I don't think you should mess around with no gun, man," Tito said.
"When I think about that, it makes me sad."

Tito does not say he is afraid of the gun or afraid of the consequences of carrying a gun. Instead, he says that he is sad. Why do you suppose that is?

As Tito, write an entry to your daily journal discussing why the idea of the gun makes you feel sad. Does the idea of the gun make you feel afraid? Why or why not?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

38. When Mrs. Parsons and Dwayne enter the principal's office, Jamal knows that Dwayne did not keep quiet about the gun. Mrs. Parsons is demanding that Mr. Davidson call the police and have Jamal arrested for threatening Dwayne with a gun. Dwayne does not say much in the meeting, but he is unable to look Jamal in the eye.

In your opinion, was Dwayne correct to tell his mother about the gun? If you were Dwayne, how would you have handled the situation?

Write a letter to Dwayne giving him your opinion on his behavior. If you can, give him some advice on how to handle a similar situation in the future.

39. In the following excerpt Jamal describes Tito's house.

Tito's house was different than his. Everything seemed older, but really nice. There was a cup filled with pencils on a dark wood cabinet. He had seen Tito's plates. The ones he ate on were white with small red stripes on them. But he had others, too, that he said Abuela had brought with her from Puerto Rico years before. They had a picture of a man and a woman who looked as if they came from George Washington's times, but they both had dark hair and the man carried a violin. There was a large platter on the wall with the same design.

Write a similar paragraph describing a friend's home that you like, but that is different from your home.