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Reflections: A Student Response Journal



Slam!
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. 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 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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39. In the following passage Slam discusses his feeling about Ice.

“The thing was, I didn’t see nothing in Ice that I didn’t see in me or Pops. Sometimes it was like we were all edging around that big truth we knew was out there waiting to get us. That’s why we could hang tough when we hung together, and why when things broke down and one brother or sister showed wrong we came down so hard. The same truth that got your brother in the middle of the block was waiting for you on the corner.”

Write a conversation between yourself and another student discussing this passage. In the conversation, explain to the student the nature of the truth Slam is referring to in the above passage.

Chapter Fifteen

40. Slam attends the basketball game between Carver and Trinity. He wants to watch Ice play, and he also wants to see how well Brothers plays against Ice. Part of Slam wants his best friend Ice to do well against Brothers, but the other part wants Ice to have as much trouble with Brothers as Slam did when Trinity played Latimer. Think about your relationships with your friends. Write about a time that you may have experienced the kind of mixed feelings that Slam is describing in this chapter.
41. In this chapter, Slam describes the match between Ice and Brothers. Assume you are a talent scout for a college with a good basketball program. You have one basketball scholarship to offer the best player on either the Carver or the Trinity teams. Write a paragraph discussing which player you would select and why.
42. At the end of this chapter, Mtisha admits to Slam that she is afraid of saying too much around him. Why do you suppose she feels this way?

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52. In Art class, Slam is asked to draw a portrait from memory. He decides to draw Mtisha. He tries to capture how Mtisha makes him feel. Think about a special person in your life, and then write a description of how this person makes you feel. Slam uses a warm brown color to draw Mtisha, because she makes him feel warm. What colors would you use to draw the special person in your life?
53. How do you think Slam feels when he learns from Goldy that he is going to be the one guarding Ice in the game with Carver? Remember that Ice is Slam's best friend.

Chapter Nineteen

54. Presented with a big obstacle, Slam describes his strategy to guard Ice in the game against Carver. He says,
- “When I go into a big game I always try to do at least one thing right away. Sometimes I try to slam. Sometimes I try to stuff the dude I'm holding so he knows who's the boss. Against Ice it was different. Brothers hadn't worked him, hadn't stayed on his case. I decided to just make sure he brought all his weight on every play.”

If you were Ice, what strategy would you use to try and guard Slam?

55. Slam is looking for the inch when he is playing Carver. He writes,
- “If I can get up an inch higher than my man, I can do something he can't do, if I can reach an inch further than he can, I can get to the ball first.”

How might you apply Slam's strategy to strive for an advantage in your own life?

56. Ice is a good loser. He shakes hands with the opposing team and puts his arm around Slam's neck. How would you have felt if you were Ice? How would you have handled the situation?