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Monster
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.

Introduction

1. You've probably heard the phrase "you can't judge a book by its cover." Before you begin to read this book or even turn it over, examine its front cover. Using only the front cover of *Monster* as a basis, write a short paragraph that explains what you think is the subject matter of this book.
2. We don't yet know the name of the narrator of this book, but in the introduction, he tells us that his story is "about being alone when you are not really alone." In other words, his story is about feeling alone, even when you are around lots of other people. All of us have probably felt like that at one time or another. This is a common feeling most people have, even those you would think never feel left out or alone.

In a short, two-paragraph essay, describe a time when you were in a group of people, yet felt like you were alone.

3. The narrator says that he thinks of his life like a movie. If you were making a movie of your life, which actors would you choose to play yourself, your parents, and a few relatives and friends?

Make a three-column list. In the first column, list the people you want to be in the movie; in the second column, list the actor you want to play each character; and in the third column, write a sentence explaining why each actor would do a good job portraying each person.

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7. As he sits in court, Steve scribbles words into a notebook. When O'Brien asks him what he's doing, he says that "[he's] writing [his experiences] down as a movie." In fact, what we're reading is the movie script that Steve is writing.

Take an event that has happened to you today and write it in the form of a movie script, just the way Steve does. Here is a sample; you may use something similar to this or create your own:

Scene I

Interior: A darkened bedroom. There are posters on the wall, mostly depicting sports figures and rock stars. Dirty clothes are scattered around the floor. The camera moves in on a body-sized lump on the top of a bed. From this angle, it's impossible to tell if the lump is a person or just the wadded-up bedclothes. Suddenly, an alarm bell rings.

Me: Arrrggghhh! What? I just got to sleep.

A voice calls from outside the bedroom door.

Unseen person: Are you getting up today, or what?

Me: Okay, okay. Give me a break. I just...

8. Steve goes into a short, but very specific description of the characters as they are introduced. For example, the judge is "tall and thin...[with] wispy white hair." He is also "60 years old [, and he] already looks bored." Through this description, we get a pretty accurate portrayal of the judge. We know that he is older, his hair is thinning, and because he looks bored, he's probably not very interested in the trial.

Imagine that you are a character in *Monster*. Write a detailed paragraph in which you describe yourself as Steve would describe you. Remember that Steve's descriptions include both physical and personality traits.

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13. At the beginning of the trial, Jose Delgado, a clerk at the drugstore where Mr. Nesbitt was killed, testifies. Among the things he is asked is whether he knows about martial arts and if the police ever visited the drugstore. These points seem a little strange to consider. What does it matter what Jose's hobbies are? What difference does it make if the police would stop by the drugstore occasionally?

Write a note to a study partner, who just doesn't get it, explaining why a lawyer would ask Jose such questions.

14. The whole point of having a trial is to find out who is lying and who is telling the truth about an incident. Many people believe that you can learn how to tell if someone is lying, just by watching how that person moves his or her body or by noticing the inflection of the person's voice.

Make a list of times when you think it might be proper or best to not tell the truth to someone. Then, write paragraph or two that would state an opinion about why the whole idea of lying is wrong.

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23. O'Brien fears that the jurors, regardless of what's said in court, already think that Steve is guilty. After all, she says, Steve is "young,...Black, and on trial." This attitude shows a lot of racial prejudice.

Write a note to one of the jurors, explaining why he or she should not think that Steve was involved in the holdup just because he is a young black man.

24. It keeps being brought up that Steve is a "monster." Monsters play a big role in fiction, from Count Dracula and Frankenstein to Michael Myers, and Freddy Kruger. Sometimes, monsters are portrayed as being real creatures like vampires, werewolves, or dragons. Other times, monsters are figurative things that stand for fears that we all have, like the fear of death or being buried alive. In your opinion, is there such a thing as a monster, real or imagined? What is your definition of a monster?

Write a short speech about the existence of monsters. Offer your opinion about whether there are such things as monsters in the modern world.

25. Often, people on trial are judged according to the way they look. You may have seen trials on TV, for instance, where the defendant comes into court well-groomed and wearing a nice suit instead of a prison uniform. Defense lawyers often counsel their clients to dress nicely to make the jury think that such a well-dressed person could not possibly have been evil enough to commit a crime.

It's not unusual for someone to judge another person based solely on that person's appearance. Write an article for a fashion magazine, telling your readers why it is not a good thing to judge people simply by how they're dressed.