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Darnell Rock Reporting

BY

Walter Dean Myers

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SUMMARY

Thirteen-year-old Darnell's twin sister and the other members of the Corner Crew have doubts about his work on the school newspaper, but the article he writes about a homeless man changes his attitude about school.

From BWIBooks.com
(Accessed 8/08/05)



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in Martinsburg, West Virginia in 1937, Walter Dean Myers is one of the premier authors of books for children. His mother died very early in his life—an event that propelled him into experiences that later influenced him to write. It was difficult for Myers' father to raise eight children alone, and eventually, a nearby couple, Herbert and Florence Dean, took in three-year old Walter and moved to Harlem, New York. "Harlem became my home and the place where my first impressions of the world were set," says Myers.

As a child, Myers went to school in his neighborhood and attended bible school almost every day of the week. Myers had a speech impediment which made communicating difficult for him, and often found himself in fights, defending himself against kids who taunted him. After a while, one of this teachers suggested to his class that they could write something to read aloud. Young Myers began writing poetry to give voice to his thoughts and feelings, and at age sixteen, won a prize in an essay contest and a set of encyclopedias for a long narrative poem. Later, his father bought him a used typewriter, which he used to churn out a seemingly endless stream of stories.

Along with the many things he was discovering about himself, Myers was also learning how to survive. One day he had the courage to break up a fight between three gang members and a kid who had just moved into the neighborhood. He became a marked man—and felt his life was in danger.

For example, once, he was sitting in the tree in Morningside Park, across from the building he lived in, reading O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*, when some gang members spotted him and surrounded the tree. Myers jumped to the ground, flashed a stiletto in order to fend them off, and made a mad dash for his building. He escaped, but he never forgot the incident. Later he enlisted in the army, got married, had a child, went through a turbulent creative struggle, got divorced, got married again—and during all of this, kept writing, whether his work pleased him or not.

But Walter Dean Myers' life is not the story of a tormented, embittered artist. Rather it is the story of a gifted, complex person committed to sharing that gift with young readers. Myers' stories and novels paint a powerful picture of the pressures of growing up on big city streets. Yet, he emphasizes close relationships, trust, and personal growth.

It seems that one of Myers' greatest struggles was to understand what type of writer he wanted to be. As the years passed and his books became more and more popular, Walter Dean Myers came to believe that his work filled a void for African American youths who yearned for positive reading experiences and role models. He frequently writes about children who share similar economic and ethnic situations with his own childhood. "But my situation as a parent did not mirror that of my childhood," he says. "While my parents were quite poor, my children are thoroughly entrenched in the middle class experience. To them African prints go well with designer jeans, pizzas go down easier to a reggae beat, and shopping malls are an unmistakable part of their culture."

It is clear that Myers' understanding of both the world he was raised in and the world of his children allows him to bring an authority to his work that resonates with his young readers. It is one of many attributes that has made him one of the most important children's and young adult authors writing today. Among his many honors are two Newbery Honor books for *Scorpions* and *Somewhere in the Darkness*. He is also a two-time recipient of the Coretta Scott King Award for *Now Is Your Time!* and *Fallen Angels*. In addition, Myers has received the Margaret A. Edwards Award for his contribution to young adult literature.

Myers' novel, *Darnell Rock Reporting*, is a warm and humorous story about thirteen-year-old Darnell Rock—a boy who works on his school newspaper. The book is sure to appeal to reluctant readers. Myers' recent picture book, *How Mr. Monkey Saw the Whole World*, is a cautionary fable about a watchful monkey who sees that a greedy buzzard gets his comeuppance.

Myer's recent work, *145th Street: Short Stories (A Boston Globe-Horn Book Honor Book)* captures the heartbeat of one memorable block in Harlem, New York. These powerful, often gripping stories range from humor and celebration to terror and grief.

Walter Dean Myers, the father of three grown children, lives with his wife in Jersey City, New Jersey.



BOOK REVIEW

From School Library Journal

Grade 5-8-Darnell Rock, 13, has always taken a lackadaisical attitude toward school and is a fringe member of the Corner Crew, South Oakdale Middle School's semi-deviant clique. Although they are quite close, he and his twin sister, Tamika, engage in nonstop verbal one-upmanship. Things begin to change for Darnell after he joins, on a whim, the staff of the school newspaper. He has a chance encounter with a homeless man and ends up writing an article that advocates turning over a piece of school property to the homeless so that they can grow vegetables there. This proposal fosters debate within the school and, after the city's daily paper picks up the story, the whole community. This experience helps Darnell grow, and he begins to look at the world around him in a different way. Once again, Myers presents a well-written story with a realistic ending and adeptly brings to life the major players-Darnell, his friends, and his middle-class African-American family. Young readers will be interested in and able to relate to these characters. While this book might not be the author's best, it's still on target.

Tom S. Hurlburt, La Crosse Public Library, WI
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From Amazon.com

http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/product-description/0385320965/ref=dp_proddesc_0/103-4903051-3031011?%5Fencoding=UTF8&n=283155



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What did you enjoy about this book?
2. What have you read that is similar to this book?
3. What are some of the major themes of this book?
4. What do you think the author was trying to accomplish with this novel?
5. Who was your favorite character? What did you appreciate about him/her?
6. Consider the main character: what does he or she believe in? What is he or she willing to fight for?
7. At the end of the book, do you feel hope for the characters?
8. What is stronger in the book: plot or character development? Why? Do you think this was intentional on the part of the author?
9. Have you ever experienced anything similar to the action of this novel?
10. Did you find this book a quick read? Why or why not?
11. What are your concerns about this book?
12. How did you feel about the main character?
13. What are the most important relationships in the book?
14. What makes a minor character memorable?
15. What are the most revealing scenes?
16. Are any of the events in the book relevant to your own life?
17. What did you think of the style of the writer?
18. Was the story credible? The characters credible?
19. Did you find any flaws in the book?
20. Compare the hardcover and paperback covers. Which one do you like better? Why?

Multnomah County Library

<http://www.multcolib.org/talk/universalquestions.html> accessed 8/8/05



AUTHOR INTERVIEW

Below is an edited version of an interview with Walter Dean Myers and TeenReads.com from February 4, 2000:

TRC: Much of your work is written for the teen reader, yet it is sophisticated enough in plot structure and subject matter to entertain adults. What made you decide to write for young adult and middle-grade readers?

WDM: The young adult and middle grade periods of my life were so vivid and, in looking back, so influential in how I would live the rest of my life, that I am drawn to it over and over again.

TRC: Have you ever considered writing fiction for adults?

WDM: I have considered writing adult fiction but, alas, no one has asked me.

TRC: Are you conscious of the age of your audience when you write? How do you find ways to connect with those readers?

WDM: I think about the story I'm writing, never about the reader. Later, during the editorial process, the editor will probably put questions to me that considers the age of the reader.

TRC: What do you think teens are looking for when they read?

WDM: They want an interesting story that touches the issues with which they are involved or, at least, concerned. They also want to be entertained.

TRC: You are probably best known for exploring the lives of young urban blacks in your fiction, yet you also write original folk tales, poetry, ghost stories, and nonfiction. Where do your ideas come from? What inspires you?

WDM: My stories are an extension of my life. I've always been a person who wanted to explore every facet of life and different ways of expressing the human experience.

TRC: How old were you when you started writing? When did you decide to become a writer?

WDM: I've been writing since I was nine. For a person with speech difficulties, writing was a way of communicating easily. It was my hobby more than a way of making a living. I'm surprised to actually be able to make money doing this thing I love.

TRC: Inspired by the success of your first picture book, WHERE DOES THE DAY GO, you went on to produce more books for children. Was it difficult at first finding a Amistad Press for your work?

WDM: I didn't consider it difficult to find a Amistad Press, although I had quite a few rejections. I was used to rejections and didn't expect a quick acceptance. After the second or third book it began to be easy.

TRC: How has your life changed since gaining acclaim as an author?

WDM: The biggest change is that I don't have to leave home to go to work. There's a lot of boring moments in this job, but lots of excitement as well. Also, this is one of those jobs where people tell you what they think of your performance via reviews, awards, etc.

TRC: Where do you do your best creative thinking? Is there any particular place that tends to inspire you?

WDM: My best ideas come as I lie in bed in the mornings after a good night's sleep.

TRC: What's a typical work day like for you?

WDM: I usually wake up around four in the morning. Lying in bed until four thirty, I consider what I want to do for the day. By five I'm up and about, and often engaged in a fight with Askia, my cat. We have differences of opinion about how soon he needs to be fed in the mornings. Five thirty finds me at the computer working to complete the seven pages, which will be my day's work. By eight, when my wife finally gets out of bed, I've done my seven pages for the day. The rest of the day I'm fairly casual about planning new work or revising a work already completed. I also like to chase Askia, which he doesn't tolerate very well. If he hides I'll spend some time aggravating my wife, who does tolerate it quite well.

TRC: We know you spend a lot of time researching and writing, but how do you spend your free time? Do you have any hobbies?

WDM: I play flute for fun and do crossword puzzles. Sometimes I write short stories simply because I like to write them. I've also written short plays, which I will probably never publish. My major hobby, writing, is also my job.

TRC: With over 30 published books and numerous literary awards, your writing career has proved enormously successful. What advice would you give to kids out there hoping to be writers someday?

WDM: What I earnestly believe is that writing can be learned by anyone truly interested in language and literature. The trick is not to wait for inspiration, but rather to train yourself to sit down and write on a regular basis. Writers don't fail because they don't write well, they fail because they don't produce. My advice to young writers is to read as much good literature as they can so they will experience the best uses of language and the most sensitive storytelling, and then train themselves to write on a regular basis.

TRC: And finally, if you could sum up the message carried through all of your work in one sentence, how would it read?

WDM: We are responsible for our own lives, and fulfill our lives when we look to understand the lives of others.

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From Teenreads.com

<http://www.teenreads.com/authors/au-myers-walterdean.asp>

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If You Like...

Darnell Rock Reporting

By Walter Dean Myers

you might like the following books, too!!

Dear Mom, Get Me Out of Here! by Ellen Conford

Plain City by Virginia Hamilton

Ola Shakes it Up by Joanne Hypolite

At the Sound of the Beep by Marilyn Sachs

Runaways On the Inside Passage by Joe Upton

Your Move by Eve Bunting

The Journal of Bidy Owens: The Negro Leagues by Walter Dean Myers

Silent Thunder: A Civil War Story by Andrea Davis Pinkney

Dave at Night by Gail Carson Levine