

Chapter 1 - Roots

1. Describe Myers' biological mother.

Tall with a fair complexion

2.

Who was Florence Dean?

The first wife of George Myers; she raised Walter;

3.

Why did Herbert and Florence move to Harlem, New York?

Florence was white, and Herbert was black; that was a problem in Baltimore and they hoped it wouldn't be an issue in NYC

4. Who

was the youngest boy of George and Mary, who ended up living with Herbert and Florence?

Walter

Milton Myers

Chapter 2 - Harlem

1. How did Myers learn how mindlessly cruel some children could be?

The children of the woman who babysat him would hide in the closet and then jump out and scare him

2. What did Myers love most about Harlem?

The music

3. What

character trait did Myers hate about Aunt Nancy?

She took a nap every day and made him take one, too

4. Why did

Myers want to learn how to read?

So that he could read to Florence

Chapter 3 – Let's Hear It for the First Grade

1. Why did Mrs. Dworkin think Walter should not be put in second grade?

Because he can't speak well enough to be in 2nd grade

2. Why did Walter like the principal's office?

Because he liked watching teachers come and go, acting like normal people

3. Why did Walter have to write 500 sentences?

Because he hit Manuel in the face for making fun of his speech

4. Having his own house key was magnificent to Walter for what two reasons?

He liked the grown-up feeling he got by locking and unlocking the door

He could sneak comic books in the house without Mama knowing

5. Why was speech therapy frustrating for Walter?

His words seemed clear to him and he couldn't pronounce them correctly for the teacher

Chapter 4 – Arithmetic Summer

1. What caused Walter to hate arithmetic?

His brother-in-law Frank was helping him and he made him memorize his math facts. If Walter hesitated at all, it was considered a wrong answer. He learned to hate math.

2. What happened in the fight with Bunny?

Bunny punched him twice and then he got in trouble.

3. Why did Walter throw the book that hit Mrs. Parker?

He was mad because she kept calling him a bully in front of class, and he was hurt and frustrated from the fight with Bunny.

4. What happened when Walter was supposed to be recovering from his surgery?

He snuck out of the house to ride his bike and when he got back in bed, his stitches had come undone and he was bleeding. He had to go back to the hospital.

Chapter 5 – Bad Boy

1. Why was the summer of 1947 one of eager anticipation for black people across the country?

Black people were beginning to be treated as equals for the first time. Jackie Robinson and Larry Doby were accepted into MLB; Joe Louis and Sugar Ray Robinson were boxing champs; armed forces were being integrated;

2. Who were the two unexpected people that entered Walter's life that summer?

George Myers, his biological father; Uncle Lee, finally out of jail

3. What did Walter and his friends do to Richard Aisles?

They decided to lynch him.

4. Why was being good in class difficult for Walter?

Because he needed to be active and that got him in trouble.

5. What was the other thing that got him in trouble?

his speech; he couldn't hear that he was speaking badly, but kids laughed at him, and he would lash out in frustration;

6. Why did Walter like books and reading so much?

To him it was like entering a different world where he heard and spoke the language clearer; he felt more like the real Walter when he was reading.

Chapter 6 – Mr. Irwin Lasher

1. How did the character of 125th Street change after more blacks found jobs in the stores?

The character of the street changed; you could hear loudspeakers in the music stores playing jazz; black businessmen and black orthodox Jews walked side by side; people were more colorful

2. How did Walter feel about books?

He felt that his mental life corresponded with books; he felt a comfort with books; they filled up the empty spaces of his life;

3. Why did Walter not want to fight about books?

He felt that they were special and said something about him that he didn't want to reveal.

4. Who was Mr. Irwin Lasher? Why was Walter put into his class?

He was Walter's sixth grade teacher; because he had a history of fighting and Mr. Lasher wouldn't tolerate any fighting in his class.

5. How did Mr. Lasher handle Walter's misbehavior that was different from his other teachers?

Instead of sending a note to Walter's mother, Mr. Lasher went home with him and talked to his mother.

6. What two important things did Mr. Lasher do for Walter that year?

He put him in speech therapy and he convinced him that his good reading ability and good test scores made him special.

7. What effect did Mr. Lasher's confidence in Walter have on his grades and conduct during that school year?

His grades improved significantly and he got a satisfactory in conduct.

8. How did Walter injure his knees? Why do YOU think he told the lie that his mother had done it to him?

He tried to hitch a ride on the bumper of a cab and was thrown off and dragged the entire length of the block.

Chapter 7 – I Am Not the Center of the Universe

1. On page 66, Walter talks about wanting to be good, but that there was something else that kept getting in the way. What was the something else?

While he wanted to be good, he also wanted to be like other kids so he would have friends.

2. What was beginning to separate Walter from other kids?

The ideas of being a good reader and being a person willing to explore the great ideas.

3. What happened that ruined Walter's birthday party?

His Uncle Lee was killed the night before.

4. How did Uncle Lee's death affect Mama and Dad?

Dad rarely talked anymore. He came home from work, ate, and then listened to a church program on the radio. Mama became depressed because of the changes in Dad.

5. What did Walter learn because of the changes in Mama and Dad?

That the world had stopped revolving around him. He was still a part of it all, but only a small part.

Chapter 8 – A Writer Observes

1. Why did Walter have a difficult time writing about Harlem and the surrounding areas?

When he looked around, he didn't see romantic images like Mark Twain wrote about; he was seeing what he had seen all his life; he didn't know how to look at the sights with fresh eyes.

2. What people did Walter decide to try to write about?

Mrs. Dodson, the Wicked Witch of the West; Melba Vaile, a part-time model and dancer; Bodie Jones, an older boy in his neighborhood;

3. What was the biggest difference between Walter and Mickey?

Mickey was laid-back and passive; Walter was aggressive;

4. Why did Walter want to be without a race rather than be black?

He had begun to accept the idea that whites were more valuable than blacks. He knew he would never be white, and therefore he wanted to be without a race.

5. What incident happened at the end of the year that had a major effect on Walter?

He was told he couldn't come to a party because he wasn't white;

Chapter 9 – Sonnets from the Portuguese

1. What was remarkable for Walter about the seventh and eighth grades?

He had no major fights and the depression of his father;

2. How old was Walter going into the ninth grade? What was unusual about that?

He was 12; he was two years younger than the other ninth graders;

3. How had Walter begun to feel about education by the ninth grade?

It had become very important to him.

4. What were the two distinct voices going on in Walter's head?

One had to do with sports, street life, and establishing himself as a male; the other was dealing with the vocabulary of literature;

5. What changed Walter's opinion that Mrs. Finley was boring?

She introduced the class to the sonnets of Elizabeth Barrett Browning; the idea of writing to someone you lived was attractive to Walter;

6. How did Walter's dad change at the holiday season?

He seemed to finally shake his blues; he took them all Christmas shopping and he kidded around with Mama.

7. What did Walter and the other SP kids take away at the end of the year?

That they each had intellectual gifts to spend as they chose

8. What did Walter learn about his father?

That he couldn't read.

Chapter 10 – Heady Days at Stuyvesant High

1. What were the two financial burdens that Walter's family experienced?

His size and his appetite

2. Why did Walter not support Mama in her "war" with Grandpa?

He had grown apart from her; he was absorbed in discovering who he was;

3. What three things were wrong with Stuyvesant High School?

It was all boys; it was in decrepit condition; it was an hour away from home;

4. Why were Walter's grades poor in his first year at Stuyvesant High?

He never studied because he had never had to study before.

5. How did Walter fill his time on weekends?

Reading and writing

6. Why did Walter become nervous about his friendship with Eric?

He knew he would not be welcome at parties that Eric was invited to; he did not want to experience the humiliation of being rejected because he was black;