

Holiday House Educators' Guide



HC: 978-0-8234-1853-4 • PB: 978-0-8234-2212-8 • Ages 12 up

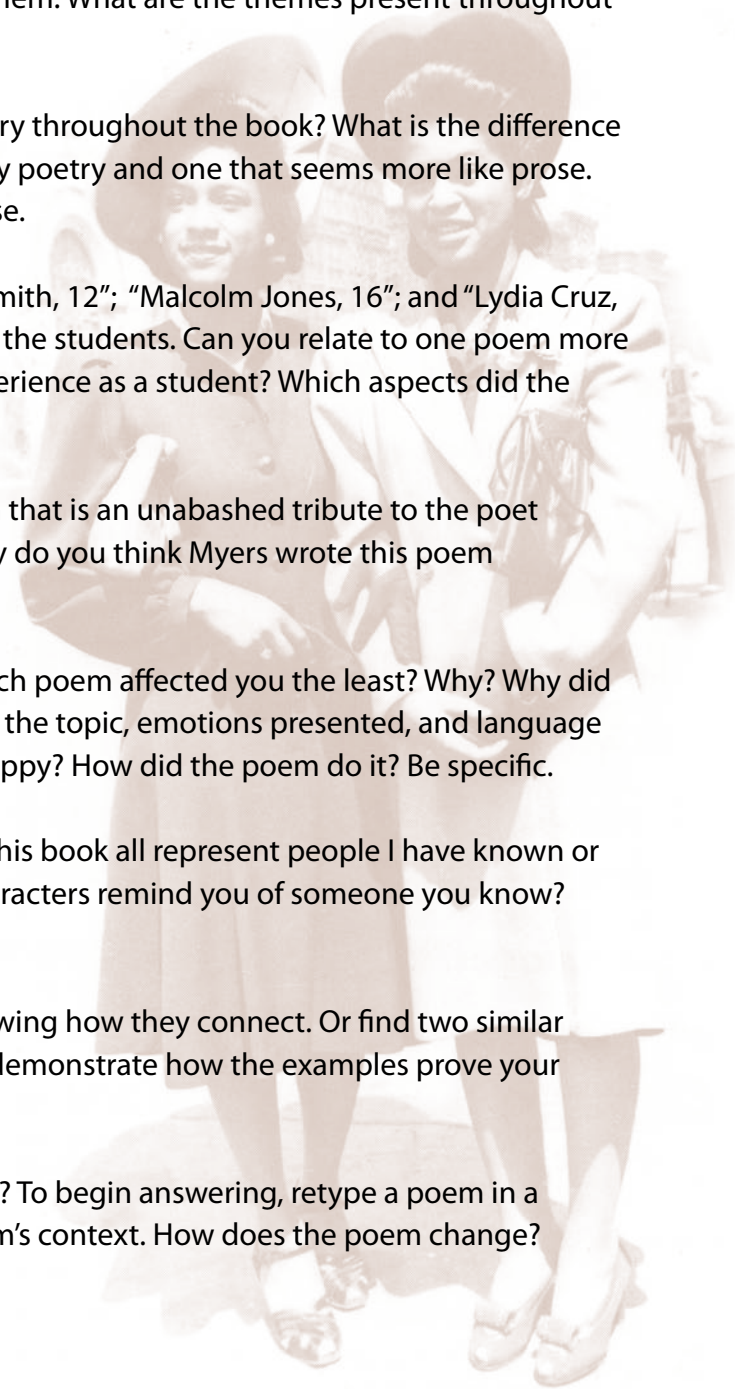
Here In Harlem Walter Dean Myers

About the Book

Here are fifty-four powerful and soulful first-person poems, all written in the voices of residents who make up the legendary neighborhood: basketball players, teachers, mail carriers, jazz artists, maids, veterans, nannies, students, and others. These poems capture the energy and resilience of a neighborhood and a people. Modeled after Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology*, *Here in Harlem* brings to readers the rhyme and rhythm of the heart of a neighborhood.

For Discussion

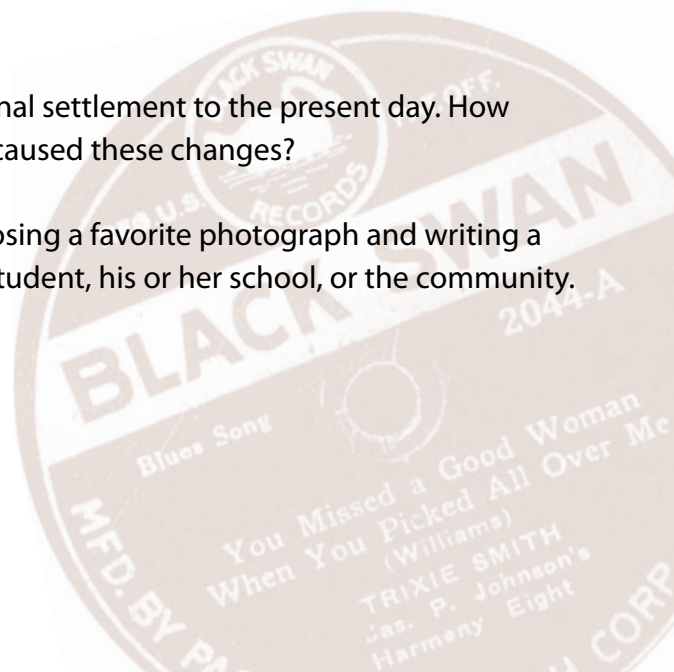
- Read through the table of contents. What can you tell about the people of Harlem from reading the list of names, ages, and occupations?
- These poems reflect the lifestyles of the people of Harlem. What are the themes present throughout the volume?
- Who is Clara Brown? How does the author use her story throughout the book? What is the difference between poetry and prose? Find a poem that is clearly poetry and one that seems more like prose. Identify what elements make them like poetry or prose.
- Read these children's poems: "Mali Evans, 12"; "Lois Smith, 12"; "Malcolm Jones, 16"; and "Lydia Cruz, 15." These poems are about the hopes and dreams of the students. Can you relate to one poem more than another? Why? Do these poems reflect your experience as a student? Which aspects did the poems capture well? Poorly?
- Myers says in his introduction: "I have written a poem that is an unabashed tribute to the poet W. B. Yeats." Which poem is it? Who is W. B. Yeats? Why do you think Myers wrote this poem as a tribute?
- Which poem affected you the most emotionally? Which poem affected you the least? Why? Why did one poem affect you while the other didn't? Consider the topic, emotions presented, and language of the poem. Did any poem make you angry? Sad? Happy? How did the poem do it? Be specific.
- In his introduction, Myers writes: "The characters in this book all represent people I have known or whose lives have touched mine." Do any of these characters remind you of someone you know? Write a poem about someone special to you.
- Pick two very different poems and write an essay showing how they connect. Or find two similar poems and show how they differ. Use examples and demonstrate how the examples prove your claims.
- How does Here in Harlem's typeface affect the poems? To begin answering, retype a poem in a different font or handwrite it. Look closely at the poem's context. How does the poem change?



- Examine the rhythm of the syntax in the poems “Willie Arnold, 30,” “William Riley Pitts, 42,” and “Willie Schockley, 23.” Do these poems remind you of song lyrics? How does the syntax and rhythm of each line create a beat? How does the author infuse his poetry with the popular music of the time?
- Read either “Macon R. Allen, 38” or “Jessie Craig, 38” silently, then have two different students read it aloud. Does the poem’s meaning change after it’s been read by three voices? What happens if the poem is sung, whispered, or shouted?
- These poems are in the voices of men and women. Use your imagination and think of what an inanimate object would say about life in Harlem—a tree, a sidewalk outside “Richmond Leake, 53”’s newspaper stand, the stoop near where “Homer Grimes, 83” sits. What would the hairbrush in Ray’s Barbershop say (“Henry Johnson, 39”)? A pew in “Effie Black, 58”’s church?
- While these poems are about the community of Harlem, many other places are mentioned, such as Selma (“William Dandridge, 67”), Timbuktu (“Charles Biner, 57”), Mount Kenya (“John Lee Graham, 49”), and the American South (“Frank Griffin, 82”). Many places within Harlem are also mentioned, such as the Alhambra Theater (“Etta Peabody, 60”) and Striver’s Row (“Didi Taylor, 14”). What is the significance of these places to Harlem? To the voices in the poems?

Beyond the Book

- The voices here are fictional; however, they mention some real people. Have students focus on one of the lives and share it in a presentation to the class. Some people mentioned are: James P. Johnson, Malcolm X, and Langston Hughes.
- Where is Harlem? Study the history of Harlem, from its original settlement to the present day. How have the demographics of the community changed? What caused these changes?
- Many students are interested in photography. Suggest choosing a favorite photograph and writing a poem about it. Perhaps the poem could be about a fellow student, his or her school, or the community.



REVIEWS

- ★ "Collectively they offer a colorful and warmly personal portrayal of Harlem. Whether used as a performance piece or read from cover to cover, this unusual book will be long remembered."— *Booklist* (starred review)
- ★ "One of Myers's best—and that's saying a lot. Sure to be a classic."
— *Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)
- ★ "And Harlem is indeed home, to all of the people who give voice to its pain and pleasures. Readers will want to visit again and again."— *Publishers Weekly* (starred review)
- ★ "Myers's skill with characterization and voice are apparent as he . . . bring[s] Harlem to life for readers. Use this title to supplement classroom presentations, for individual or choral recitation, or simply suggest that teens find a good chair, get comfortable, and listen to what the people have to tell them."— *School Library Journal* (starred review)



Photo by John Craig

About the Author

Born in Martinsburg, West Virginia, in 1937, **Walter Dean Myers** is a noted poet and novelist. Mr. Myers grew up in Harlem, New York, which would become the setting for many of his books. The winner of two Newbery Honor Awards (for *Somewhere in the Darkness* and *Scorpions*), five Coretta Scott King Awards, and the first Michael L. Printz Award (for *Monster*), Mr. Myers now lives in New Jersey. All of the photographs featured in the book are from his personal collection.

Holiday House 425 Madison Avenue New York, NY 10017
www.holidayhouse.com