

Name _____

Date _____

Read the excerpt and answer the following questions in complete sentences.

From *Bad Boy*

By Walter Dean Myers

Background

In his memoir, Walter Dean Myers describes his childhood growing up in Harlem, New York, in the 1940s and 1950s. He writes from the point of view of his younger self. This excerpt takes place when Walter was in elementary school. Earlier in the chapter, his teacher, Mrs. Conway, lends him books to read upon noticing his interest in reading.

There were two categories of friends in my life: those with whom I played ball and everyone else. Athletes were highly respected in the black community, and boys my age were encouraged to play some sport. I loved playing ball. I would play basketball in the mornings with the boys who were just reaching their teens, and then stoop ball or punchball on the block with the boys my age. Sometimes Eric and I would go down to the courts on Riverside Drive and play there. And I was a bad, bad loser. Most of my prayers, when they weren't for the Dodgers, were quick ones in the middle of a game, asking God to let me win. I liked other sports as well and even followed the New York Rangers hockey team in the papers for a while until I found out that all the references to ice meant just that, they were skating on ice. There wasn't any ice to skate on in Harlem, so I gave up hockey.

With school out and me not having access to Mrs. Conway's cache of books, I rediscovered the George Bruce Branch of the public library on 125th Street. Sometimes on rainy days I would sit in the library and read. The librarian always suggested books that were too young for me, but I still went on a regular basis. I could never have afforded to buy the books and was pleased to have the library with its free supply.

Being a boy meant to me that I was not particularly like girls. Most of the girls I knew couldn't play ball, and that excluded them from most of what I wanted to do with my life. Dorothy Dodson, daughter of the Wicked Witch, read books, and I knew she did, but she couldn't stand me and was more than happy to tell me so on a number of occasions. Sometimes I would see other children on the trolley with books under their arms and suspected that they were like me somehow. I felt a connection with these readers but didn't know what the connection was. I knew there were things going on in my head, a fantasy life that somehow corresponded to the books I read. I also felt a kind of comfort with books that I did not experience when I was away from them. Away from books I was, at times, almost desperate to fill up the spaces of my life. Books filled those spaces for me.

As much as I enjoyed reading, in the world in which I was living it had to be a secret vice. When I brought a book home from the library, I would sometimes run into older kids who would tease me about my reading. It was, they made it clear, not what boys did. And though by now I was fighting older boys and didn't mind that one bit, for some reason I didn't want to fight about books. Books were special and said something about me that I didn't want to reveal. I began taking a brown paper bag to the library to bring my books home in.

That year I learned that being a boy meant that I was supposed to do certain things and act in a certain way. I was very comfortable being a boy, but there were times when the role was uncomfortable. We often played ball in the church gym, and one rainy day, along with my brother Mickey and some of "my guys," I went to the gym, only to find a bevy of girls exercising on one half of the court. We wanted to run a full-court

game, so we directed a few nasty remarks to the other side of the small gym. Then we saw that the girls were doing some kind of dance, so we imitated them, cracking ourselves up.

When the girls had finished their dancing, they went through some stretching exercises. A teenager, Lorelle Henry, was leading the group, and she was pretty, so we sent a few *woo-woos* her way.

“I bet you guys can’t even do these stretching exercises,” Lorelle challenged.

“We scoffed, as expected.

“If you can do these exercises, we’ll get off the court,” Lorelle said. “If not, you go through the whole dance routine with us.”

It was a way to get rid of the girls, and we went over to do the exercises. Not one of us was limber enough to do the stretching exercises, and soon we were all trying to look as disgusted as we could while we hopped around the floor to the music.

They danced to music as a poem was being read. I like the poem, which turned out to be “The Creation” by James Weldon Johnson. I liked dancing, too, but I had to pretend that I didn’t like it. No big deal. I was already keeping reading and writing poems a secret; I would just add dancing.

Restate the question and answer in complete sentences.

1. What is a memoir?

2. Describe the setting of the story (time and place). How does the setting impact Walter’s choice in sports?

3. Describe the main character.

4. What is the main conflict in the story?

5. What do you think Myers means in the bolded line in paragraph 5?

6. What is the resolution of the story (how is the conflict resolved)?

7. Why do you think people feel the need to create false impressions of themselves?

8. If you were in Myers situation, would you act the same way? Explain.
