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Slam!

Objectives

By the end of this unit, the student will be able to:

1. define vocabulary words from the text, including basketball terms, to describe the action of the games.

2. deduce from the context the meanings of slang expressions.

3. identify instances of allusion in the story.

4. discuss the extent to which Slam is a reliable narrator.

5. recognize examples of similes and personification.

6. find sensory images that enhance the description of the setting.

7. discuss the title’s significance to the story.

8. cite incidents that mark the text as a coming of age story for Slam.

9. identify instances of humor in the story and discuss how it helps to lighten the mood.

10. compare Slam and Ice and discuss the reasons why each takes a different path in life.

11. cite incidents from the story to illustrate the following themes:
   - To be successful, even as a player in the NBA, a person must have a good education.
   - To be a success in life, a person must believe he can succeed, find something he loves to do and then work hard to achieve his goals.
   - Good friends help each other to overcome difficulties and achieve positive goals.
   - Drugs have the power to destroy lives.
   - A supportive family unit helps a young person achieve his or her goals.
   - Unfair judgments of others must not discourage a person.
   - In basketball, as in life, a person must be a team player.

12. relate incidents that demonstrate the positive and negative impacts of growing up in Harlem on Slam’s life.
Slam!

Test

Multiple Choice

1. Mr. Nipper, the coach of the basketball team, does not like Slam because
   A. Slam is late for the first practice.
   B. Slam is African-American.
   C. he believes Slam has an attitude problem.
   D. Slam is friends with Ice, a known drug dealer.
   E. Slam is not a good student and does not get good grades.

2. To have more time for his studies, Slam agrees to give up
   A. art class.
   B. the Art Club.
   C. seeing Mtisha.
   D. partying with Ice.
   E. his after-school job.

3. Which of the following slang expressions describes Slam's opinion of Mtisha?
   A. fly
   B. tough body
   C. whack
   D. Both A and B
   E. A, B, and C

4. Slam demonstrates that he is a good brother to Derek when he
   A. forgives Derek for losing the video camera.
   B. defends Derek in a street fight.
   C. generously gives Derek the last piece of pizza in the refrigerator.
   D. Both A and B
   E. A, B, and C

5. Slam is successful playing basketball, but unsuccessful at math because
   A. he does not respect his math teacher.
   B. he knows how to win on the basketball court, but does not understand how to
      be successful in other areas of his life.
   C. the basketball coach is willing to spend extra time helping Slam to play basket-
      ball, but the math teacher is unwilling to work with Slam.
   D. he does not need to do well in math to be an NBA star.
   E. he has a learning disability that makes math difficult to understand.
6. Slam finally accepts that Ice is a drug dealer when
   A. he sees Ice's beeper.
   B. he rides in Ice's fancy car.
   C. he witnesses Ice giving drugs to a young woman on the roof of an apartment house.
   D. Mtisha tells Slam that Ice may be a drug dealer.
   E. he notices Ice's cellular phone.

7. The college scouts are probably interested in Nick, rather than Slam, because
   A. Nick has good grades.
   B. Nick is a team player.
   C. Nick has good standardized test scores.
   D. Both A and B
   E. A, B, and C

8. Which of the following characters help Slam to stay in school after he loses his temper with Mr. Parrish and nearly gets expelled?
   A. Willie King
   B. Ice
   C. Mtisha
   D. Mr. Green
   E. Goldy

9. Slam has trouble in math, but he is good at
   A. art and gym class.
   B. art and making videotapes.
   C. making videotapes and history.
   D. history and art.
   E. gym class and history.

10. Slam is able to defeat Ice in the match between Latimer and Carver because
    A. Ice gives up, while Slam stretches himself to do his best throughout the game.
    B. Ice is on drugs.
    C. Ice is out of shape because he spends too much time dealing drugs and partying.
    D. Ice is tense because he wants to go to college, and he knows college scouts will watch a video of the game.
    E. Slam has the benefit of a wonderful, supportive coach.

11. Slam's Grandmother teaches him that
    A. he must take responsibility for his own life and learn to deal with difficulties on his own.
    B. sometimes it is all right to give up on life, if one is old and ill.
    C. even family members can be cruel and heartless.
    D. taking drugs can ruin a person's life.
    E. he must turn to his friends, instead of his family, when he is in trouble.
12. Pops does not want Mr. Randall to help Slam with his math because
   A. he is out of work, drinking, and unable to think rationally.
   B. he believes school is a waste of Slam's time.
   C. he does not like the idea of another man acting like a father figure to his son.
   D. he does not think Slam needs any help.
   E. Mr. Randall is Caucasian.

13. Slam persuades Mtisha to forgive him for kissing Kicky by
   A. getting down on his knees and begging for her forgiveness.
   B. appealing to her mother, who in the past supported his relationship with Mtisha.
   C. promising to never do it again.
   D. telling Mtisha how he truly feels about her.
   E. proposing marriage to Mtisha.

14. Slam listens to Goldy's advice because
   A. Goldy understands how Slam feels about basketball.
   B. Goldy listens to Slam.
   C. Goldy is African-American, like Slam.
   D. Both A and B
   E. A, B, and C

15. Slam's real name is
   A. Greg Harris.
   B. Benny Reese.
   C. Derek Harris.
   D. Jimmy Ellis.
   E. Nick.

16. Besides Slam, which boy is the best basketball player at Latimer?
   A. Jimmy
   B. Ducky
   C. Trip
   D. Ice
   E. Nick

17. In Chapter Two Slam writes,
   “But if Mtisha was peeping something strange about Ice I knew I should check it out.”
   (Pg. 31) In the above passage “peeping” is slang for
   A. a peeping tom, or someone who looks into windows to spy on another.
   B. seeing or understanding something hidden concerning another's life.
   C. being killed or destroyed in some way.
   D. laughing at someone in an immature way.
   E. appreciating a person's good looks.
18. From watching the videotape of Carver's game with Trinity, Slam notices that
A. Ice does not seem to care that Brothers slams the ball.
B. Ice is in tip-top shape and does not even seem to be winded during the game.
C. Brothers always fakes to the left.
D. Both A and B
E. A, B, and C

19. Slam's strategy against Ice in the final game of the season is to
A. run Ice all over the court to tire him out.
B. guard Ice very closely all of the game.
C. double-team him.
D. make Ice mad to break his concentration on the game.
E. be careful not to foul Ice, thus giving him a chance to make penalty free throws.

20. Which of the following phrases would make a good sub-title for this novel?
A. Life in the Hood
B. Double Team Life
C. Looking for the Inch
D. When to Throw in the Towel
E. Rebounds

Essays (Answer any two.)

1. Ice and Slam are raised together in Harlem almost like brothers, yet Ice becomes a drug dealer and Slam has a chance at a better future. Compare Ice and Slam to analyze why one has a future and the other does not. Consider the following: character traits, family support, attitude, and opportunity to change.

2. In the story, Slam videotapes his neighborhood. Write a script for a video of Slam's life, showing the following scenes. In the script, describe the scenes and what Slam learns from each.
   Scenes:
   - Slam at the hospital, visiting his grandmother
   - Slam talking to Goldy in the restaurant, after Slam nearly punches Mr. Parrish
   - Ice and Slam talking after Latimer beats Carver in the big game

3. Write another chapter for the book, describing Slam's life five years in the future. Support each prediction you make about his life by referring to an incident in the story that may contribute to Slam's future choices.

4. Critics agree that Slam! is a coming of age story for the main character. Select three incidents from the story and discuss how these incidents illustrate that Slam is coming to understand the world in adult terms.
Slam!
Test
Answer Key

Slam!
Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Why is Slam attending Latimer instead of Carver? In what ways is Latimer different from Carver? How do you think he feels about his new school?

2. List three ways Ice's home life is different from Slam's home life. To what extent do you think Ice's family background contributes to his decision to sell drugs? What other factors may have influenced his decision?

3. Cite an incident from the story proving that Slam possesses each of the following character traits:
   loyalty, compassion, intelligence, drive, good listener, quick temper, respectful of the feelings of others, artistic, loving, self-confidence

4. Why is it important for Slam to improve his math skills?

5. Cite two incidents from the story to support each of the following themes.
   Drugs, like crack cocaine, have the power to destroy lives.
   A person must not allow himself to be discouraged by the unfair judgements and actions of others.

6. In the following conversation Slam is talking to Grandma Ellie in the hospital about the difficulties he experiences with his schoolwork at Latimer. How does Slam feel about his grandmother's advice?
   “It's hard, ain't it, son?” Grandma Ellis put her hand on my shoulder.
   “Yes, ma'am.”
   “Well, I just want to share this with you, baby,” she said, softly. “I really don't care because it's not my life. And I'd bet two Roosevelt dimes that nobody else cares – maybe excepting your mama and that's cause she still thinks it's her job – because it ain't their lives. It's your life, do you care?”
   “Yeah.”
   “Then deal with it.” (Pg. 35)

7. What lessons about life can Slam learn from Nick?

8. Slam watches the tape of Carver's match with Trinity. What disturbs Slam about this game?

9. In what ways does Coach Nipper's behavior toward Slam change at the end of the story? What do you think happens to bring about this change?
10. At the end of the book Slam writes, "Maybe that was the way to work it. Maybe if I could get my game right, all my game, on and off the court, I would get over." (Pg. 266)

In what sense does Slam need to get his game right off the court? In what ways has he changed the way he plays basketball?

11. For what reasons does Pops object to the math tutor Mr. Tate finds for Slam? How does Slam improve his math skills without this tutor?

12. What advice does Goldy give to Slam about life? Why do you think Slam listens to Goldy?
 definitions and terms

Allusion - a reference to a person, place, poem, book, event, etc., which is not part of the story, that the author expects the reader will recognize. Example: In The Glass Menagerie, Tom speaks of “Chamberlain’s umbrella,” a reference to British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain.

Local Color - details and descriptions common to a certain place. Example: The Mississippi River, the people living around it, and the way they talk, act, think, etc., are essential to The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.

Narrator - the one who tells the story. The narrator must not be confused with “author,” the one who writes the story. If the narrator is a character in the book, the proper term is “first-person narration.” Example: Moby Dick is narrated by Ishmael, a crewmember. If the narrator is not a character in the book, the correct term is “third-person narration.” Example: Sense and Sensibility

Personification - a figure of speech in which an object, abstract idea, or animal is given human characteristics. Examples: The wall did its best to keep out the invaders.

“Because I could not stop for Death,
He kindly stopped for me.”

–Emily Dickinson

Sensory images - the use of details from any, some, or all of the five senses. Example: He reached behind him, felt the wall, and was more secure.

Simile - a comparison between two different things using either like or as. Examples: I am as hungry as a horse. The huge trees broke like twigs during the hurricane.

Theme - the central or dominant idea behind the story; the most important aspect that emerges from how the book treats its subject. Sometimes theme is easy to see, but, at other times, it may be more difficult. Theme is usually expressed indirectly, as an element the reader must figure out. It is a universal statement about humanity, rather than a simple statement dealing with plot or characters in the story. Themes are generally hinted at through different methods: a phrase or quotation that introduces the novel, a recurring element in the book, or an observation made that is reinforced through plot, dialogue, or characters. It must be emphasized that not all works of literature have themes in them. Example: In a story about a man who is diagnosed with cancer and, through medicine and will-power, returns to his former occupation, the theme might be: “Real courage is demonstrated through internal bravery and perseverance.” In a poem about a flower that grows, blooms, and dies, the theme might be: “Youth fades, and death comes to all.”
Slam!

Notes

Slam! is a coming of age story about a young, Africa-American, high school basketball player from Harlem, who must learn to compete in an academically challenging, mostly white, magnet school. Walter Dean Myers masterfully describes basketball action, and students in grades 7–9 will enjoy this fast-paced and upbeat sports story. Told in first person, the novel includes many slang phrases that add interest and believability to the narrative. Students can infer meanings of the slang terms from the text, so they do not add complexity to the story. To fully understand the basketball action, students should have a basic understanding of the game rules and terminology.

All references come from the Scholastic Edition of Slam!, copyright 1996.
backdoor play: the center flips the ball behind him to a player who is on the baseline
ball handler: player who dribbles well and keeps the ball away from opponents
ball-hawking: stealing the ball
box out: when a player positions himself between the opponents and stops them from getting a rebound or making a basket
center: usually the tallest player, often the one who gets rebounds
defense: the team without the ball
dishing: passing
double-teaming: two defenders guard one offensive player
dunk: when a player jumps up and slams the ball into the basket
forward: two per team; they shoot well from the corners and are good rebounders
foul shot: an unguarded shot taken from the foul line by a player who has been fouled; worth one point.
give-and-go: when the player with the ball passes it to another player and then runs toward the basket to get the ball back and take a shot
guard: the play-makers and the shooters
high and low post: position where the center plays on offense; low post is near the basket and high post is at the top of the key
laying on a player: elbowing during a play; a foul if contact between the players is made
layup: a shot made from just under the basket and usually off the backboard
man-to-man: type of defense when one player is assigned to guard another player
offensive: the team with the ball
one-on-one: two players playing against each other as a test of each other's basketball skills
overload one side of the zone: defense where the five players are distributed unevenly with three on one side and two on the other
pick: an offensive player positions himself so that he blocks or interferes with a defensive player. The player with the ball then can break free and take a shot
pill: the basketball
rebound: when a player gets the ball after a failed shot
reverse slam: a behind-the-back dunk
skins: the shirtless team
three point shot: when a player is standing behind the 3-point line on the court and makes a basket
tip-off: a basketball game is started with a jump ball
top of the key: the key is the circle on the basketball court which connects with the foul line. The top of the key is the top edge of the circle.
zone defense: each player is assigned an area of the court to defend and must guard any player from the opposing team who enters the assigned area.
Chapter One

Vocabulary

prima donnas – temperamental, vain, or arrogant people

1. Why does Slam believe that the only time in his life that he is “being for real” is when he is playing basketball? (Pg. 1)

_Slam feels in control of himself and of his life when he is on a basketball court. He knows how to win a basketball game, but he does not always know how to win in real life._

2. How does Slam feel when Mr. Tate calls his mother into the office for a conference?

_Mr. Tate wants Slam to improve his school grades. He recommends to Slam’s mother that he stop playing basketball to work on his math. Slam does not think Mr. Tate understands how important playing basketball is to his life. He is upset, because he knows his mother is hurt when she hears her son is not doing well in school._

3. Briefly describe each of the following characters introduced in this chapter. Include Slam’s feelings about each character.

Mr. Harris: He is Slam’s father. Pops is a good father and husband when he is working, but when he is laid off, Pops drinks and can be nasty. Slam describes him as a “thin and nervous-looking” man. (Pg. 5) Slam seems to like and understand his father.

Derek: Derek is Slam’s nine-year-old brother. Slam describes him as an energetic young boy, with a crooked grin. Slam worries about his brother because he knows the streets are not safe.

Moms: Slam’s mother once was a beautiful woman who is now heavier. She is a good mother, and Slam describes her as being “in my corner.” (Pg. 4) Slam listens to his mother and wants her to be proud of him.

4. Find an example of humor in this chapter.

Answers will vary. Example: “Don’t you hit Derek,” she [Moms] said. “He’s the only cute child I got.” (Pg. 8)
5. What compromise does Slam agree to, after talking to his mother about his grades?

He agrees to give up the Art Club to spend more time on his studies.

6. For what reason(s) does Slam make a poor impression on the coach, Mr. Nipper, during the basketball try out?

Slam arrives late to the try out. When the coach tells Slam to play center, Slam refuses and tells the coach he is a guard. The coach decides to play one-on-one with Slam because he believes Slam is overconfident. Slam wins the match and lets the coach know that he does not respect the coach's game.

7. How does Slam rate the playing abilities of the following boys?

Ducky: Ducky is five feet six with red hair and a pained expression on his face. He acts like he does not want anyone to pass him the ball. Slam notices that he cannot run right and jumps for rebounds even when he is not close to the basket.

Jimmy Ellis: He is the other black player, besides Slam, on the floor. Slam believes Jimmy is an okay player, but not a great player.

Nick: He is the only player, other than Slam, who has a good game. He wears a long black coat and does not talk to the other boys when he leaves.

8. “Local color writing” refers to a kind of fiction that is devoted to capturing the unique customs, manners, speech, folklore, and other qualities, of a particular regional community, usually in humorous short stories. To what extent is this chapter an example of local color writing?

Answers will vary. This chapter describes the slang and everyday scenes from life for a black teenager living in Harlem. In this sense, the chapter is an example of local color writing.

9. Find a passage in the story that illustrates the author's use of sensory images to describe Slam's community. Sensory images are descriptive text, using details from the five senses to help describe the subject.

Answers will vary. Example: “If there's a fight you hear the voices rising and catching each other up. The sound of broken glass can cut through other noises, even if it's just a bottle of wine somebody dropped.” (Pg. 2)
10. Slang is highly informal speech, outside of conventional or standard usage, and consists both of coined words and phrases. *Slam!* is told in a first person narration by the protagonist. He tells the story in his own language, using many slang expressions. Based on the context clues in the story, define each of the following slang expressions or words.

*Answers will vary. Example answers are given as a guide only.*

- **tag** – *name*
- **turned out** – *stressed, unhappy*
- **scoping** – *dreaming*
- **fly** – *cool, attractive*
- **throw it down on you** – *not do well*
- **diss** – *put someone down*

**Chapter Two**

**Vocabulary**
- **crosstown** – located on the other side of a town or city
- **desperation** – recklessness resulting from despair
- **stoop** – a small platform with steps at the door of a house

1. Why is Slam attending Latimer instead of Carver High School?

   *Carver is the high school in Slam’s neighborhood. Latimer is a magnet school. Students from all over the city attend Latimer, which is known for educating smart white students.*

2. How does Slam feel about his new school?

   *Slam likes the art and history classes, but the other subjects stress him. He does not have a solid background in those subjects. The other students in his classes seem to know more than Slam.*

3. Told in the first person, the author uses many different techniques to add interest to Slam’s descriptions of his surroundings. One of these techniques is to personify an object or an animal by giving it human characteristics. For example: *The pig laughed all the way to the barn.* Find an example of personification in this chapter.

*Answers will vary. Example: “News from three days before was flapping thought the streets like it didn’t know it was old, like it was trying to be news again.” (Pg. 19)*
4. For what reasons does Slam admire Ice? Why does he feel that he and Ice are growing apart, as they get older?

Ice is like a brother to Slam. Ice can play basketball, dance and fight, when necessary. When Slam and Ice were young, they lived on the same street and shared the same babysitter. Slam believes Ice is becoming “harder” because, in Harlem, a young man must become tough to survive.

5. Ice wants to go shopping for a beeper. Why does Slam believe Ice wants a beeper?

Slam knows that drug dealers wear beepers. Kids like beepers because wearing one makes them feel and appear to be tough. Slam believes Ice wants a beeper so he can pretend he is a tough guy, who is dealing drugs.

6. Briefly describe Mtisha. How does Slam feel about Mtisha?

Mtisha is dark brown with sparkling eyes. Slam feels good when he is with her. She tells him not to fall in love with her, because she is going to college, but he is in love with her anyway.

7. What warning does Mtisha give Slam concerning his friend, Ice? Why does Slam have trouble believing that Ice is in trouble?

She believes Ice is dealing drugs. Slam and Ice grew up around the drug scene. He and Ice both understand that drug dealers can be arrested at any time. Slam also knows that Ice is a wonderful basketball player, who has a real chance to make basketball his career. Slam cannot believe that Ice would throw that chance away to deal drugs.

8. List three dangers Ice, Slam, and the other young people face as part of their everyday lives, growing up on Harlem. List two positive aspects of Slam’s life in Harlem.

Drug dealers, drunks, and drive-by shootings are three everyday dangers. One positive aspect of Slam’s life is that the people in the community seem to watch out for each other. In addition, despite the drug dealing and the poverty, Slam has a strong supportive family.
9. Based on the context clues in this chapter, define each of the following slang expressions or words.

*Answers will vary. Example answers are given as a guide.*

- **tight** – *friends*
- **scoping out** – *appreciating a person’s good looks*
- **give some sugar** – *give a friendly kiss*
- **goofed behind it** – *laughed at in an immature way*
- **hoop** – *play basketball*
- **get down with his hands** – *fight*
- **hood** – *neighborhood, specifically Harlem*
- **wasted** – *killed or destroyed in some way*
- **hanging loose** – *doing nothing important*
- **rock trade** – *dealing drugs, especially crack cocaine*
- **homey** – *more than a friend, like a brother*
- **a heavy dame** – *serious talk*
- **being slick** – *getting away with a crime, such as drug dealing*
- **jams** – *music*
- **forty** – *beer*
- **peeping** – *seeing, understanding - especially something about a person’s character or life*
- **string cut loose** – *crazy*
- **crack head** – *a person who is addicted to crack cocaine*
- **wedgies** – *thick potato slices fried like French fries*

**Chapter Three**

**Vocabulary**

- **collard greens** – *a vegetable*
- **oxtail** – *the tail of an ox used in soup or stew*

1. What advice does Grandma Ellie give Slam concerning his schoolwork? How does Slam react to this advice?

   *She tells him that it is his life and that if he cares about his schoolwork and his future, then he must deal with the difficult subjects and other challenges he faces in his new school.*

   *Slam does not think his grandmother should be criticizing his life.*
2. Based on the context clues in this chapter, define each of the following slang expressions or words.

   Answers will vary. Examples answers are given as a guide.

   raggedy – old, worn-out
   tore down – very sick

Chapter Four

Vocabulary
Durer – A German painter and wood engraver, 1471 - 1528
interpret – to explain the meaning of
latitude – freedom from narrow restrictions
legitimate – reasonable, logical, justified

1. How does Slam feel about the basketball practices? Why does Slam walk away from the second team practice?

   He does not think the coach's idea of running patterns is going to work. He also believes the practices do not work the players hard enough. Slam does not think the coach is treating him fairly.

2. What evidence is there, in this chapter, that Slam is a good brother to Derek?

   Slam only takes one dollar to sew Derek's pants, so Derek does not get into trouble with Moms.

3. Describe Mr. Goldstein (Goldy). What evidence is there that Mr. Goldstein cares about and is trying to understand Slam, so that he can help him to adjust to Latimer?

   Mr. Goldstein is thin, with stooped shoulders and a long face. He is nearly bald, except for a few strands of gray hair. Mr. Goldstein asks Slam to explain why he left the practice field, instead of launching immediately into a lecture telling Slam how he should behave. Mr. Goldstein seems to understand that playing basketball is more than just a game for Slam, and that basketball is important because it is something Slam can do better than most of the other boys in his neighborhood.

4. What is Slam's dream for his future?

   Slam wants to play for the NBA.
5. Why does Slam listen to music instead of working on his math homework?

_Slam is unable to concentrate on his studies. He is upset because the basketball practices did not go well. He thinks he will be forced to either give up the team, or stay on the team and sacrifice his self-respect._

6. Based on the context clues in this chapter, define each of the following slang expressions or words.

*Answers will vary. Example answers are given as a guide.*

- **showboat** – showoff
- **brainiac** – highly intelligent
- **tough body** – good figure
- **give someone a play** – give the person a chance
- **scrub** – new player who does not understand the game
- **whack** – silly, ridiculous, stupid

**Chapter Five**

1. How does Slam feel about posing for Karen's sketch?

_Slam enjoys posing for Karen. She draws his hands, so he assumes she not only likes him, but also appreciates his hands._

2. Why is Slam called to the school office? How does Slam react to Mr. Tate's proposal?

_Slam's mother is in Mr. Tate's office. Mr. Tate wants to introduce Slam to Richie Randall, a black man who is a graduate of Howard University. Mr. Randall is a member of a group of volunteers, called the Guardians, who tutor young African-Americans. Mr. Tate wants Mr. Randall to tutor Slam in math._

_Slam refuses Mr. Randall's help. His pride is hurt, and he is insulted that Mr. Tate believes he is stupid. He does not like to be treated like he is a thing, rather than a person. He is upset, because he thinks Mr. Tate and Mr. Randall are talking about him like he is nothing._

3. What is Slam referring to in the following quote from this chapter?

“But if I can’t fly don’t be taking me to your cloud.” (Pg. 52)

*Answers will vary. Example: Slam does not want to hear about a lifestyle that he believes is not possible for him to achieve. He does not want to dream about a life he cannot have.*
4. For what reason does Slam warn his mother not to tell Pops about Mr. Randall?

He knows Pops will not be happy about another man acting like a father figure to his son.

5. How does Slam feel about not starting in the first basketball game with Regis?

Slam is angry that he is not selected as a starting player in the game. He is also upset because Ice and his other friends from the neighborhood are in the audience, and came to see him play. Instead, they will see that he is not a starting player on the team.

6. How does Slam feel when he dunks the ball? Why do you think he feels this way?

Answers will vary. Example: Slam feels good when he dunks the ball. When a player dunks a ball in basketball the player is demonstrating his/her superior skills to the other team. A slam is an insult to the opponent's ability to play the game.

Chapter Six

Vocabulary
sienna – yellowish-brown

1. After winning the game with Regis, how do the other players treat Slam? How does the coach respond to Slam's performance in the game?

The other players begin to call him Slam instead of Greg. The coach does not congratulate Slam on scoring 11 points. He does not say anything at all to Slam.

2. Why do you think Slam kisses Kicky in the backseat of Ice's car even though he is in love with Mtisha?

Answers will vary. Example: Slam wants to celebrate the team's victory over Regis. He does not want to go home where he must face his difficult homework assignments, so he goes with Ice and the two girls. Slam teases Kicky about kissing her and when she agrees, he cannot think of a good way to back away from the situation.

3. What evidence is there that Mtisha understands Slam's love for basketball?

Slam tells Mtisha how much he enjoys the feel of the pebbles on the basketball, and that to him, the seams on the ball feel like a woman. Mtisha makes a joke, but later she apologizes to Slam, because she wants him to know she understands and respects his feelings about basketball.
4. Describe Marjorie Flatley and the school project she and Slam are going to work on together.

Marjorie is blonde with brown eyes and thinks she is cute. She plays piano and many other instruments. Marjorie and Slam are going to make a video of Slam's neighborhood. He is going to take the pictures and she is going to do the editing.

5. Some critics believe the following statement is a theme for this story. Find an incident in this chapter supporting the theme.

Theme: To be a success, a person must first believe he can succeed and then work hard to achieve his goals.

Answers will vary. Example: Slam observes that Ducky will never be a good basketball player, because he does not work on his basketball skills.

6. What evidence is there that Slam feels some prejudice from the Latimer faculty? What evidence is there that the faculty cares about Slam and is interested in Slam's future?

Slam feels like he is getting the run-around when he tries to pick up the video camera from the video department, but Margie, a white girl, has no problem.

Miss Meade goes out of her way to make Slam feel good about himself by complimenting him on his ability to slam the ball.

7. Why do you think the coach asks Nick to go one-on-one with Slam?

Answers will vary. Example: He wants to see how Slam treats a fellow teammate in a one-on-one competition. The coach believes Slam has an attitude problem because he thinks he is a better player than the other team members. He wants to see if Slam will act as part of the team, or use all of his skills to humiliate Nick.
8. One of the themes of this story is the importance of friends in a young man's life. For each of the following incidents, write a brief statement about how each illustrates the theme of friendship. The first one is done for you as an example.

Answers will vary. Possible answers are included as a guide only.

Slam feeds Ducky the ball during basketball practice. *Slam is showing his friendship for Ducky by helping him overcome his fear of handling the ball. Slam hopes that by feeding Ducky the ball in practice, Ducky will improve his play enough to remain on the team.*

Karen asks Slam to pose for her. *Karen is an artist who is looking for a good model. She admires Slam's hands, and Slam likes Karen, so he poses for her because he is flattered that she asked. However, neither Slam nor Karen illustrates any real friendship for one another in this incident."

Ice encourages Slam to ride around in Ice's big car after the game, instead of going home. *Some students will believe that Ice demonstrates his friendship for Slam by first attending the game, and next by helping Slam to celebrate the team's victory after the game. Other students may note that Ice encourages Slam to let Kicky kiss him, even though Ice knows that Slam has a girlfriend.*

Slam does not act on Mtisha's warning that Ice may be dealing drugs. *Some students may point out that Slam refuses to believe anything bad about Ice, because he is Ice's friend. Others may believe that if Slam were truly Ice's friend, he would try to save Ice from the life of a drug dealer.*

Mtisha seems to understand when Slam explains to her how much he loves the feel of the pebbles on the basketball. *Mtisha is a true friend to Slam. She listens to Slam when he talks about basketball, and understands how much the sport means to him. She is interested in, and sensitive to, his feelings.*

Jimmy warns Slam that the coach asked Nick to go one-on-one with him, and that the coach believes Slam is not a team player. *Some students will believe that Jimmy should mind his own business. Others will point out that Jimmy is telling Slam about the coach's concerns, because he wants to help Slam form a better relationship with the coach.*
9. Based on the context clues in this chapter, define each of the following slang expressions or words.

*Answers will vary. Example answers are given as a guide.*

looking lame – *a person who is conventional, conservative, old-fashioned*
double deal – *double date*
crib – *bed*
is on the program – *is going to happen*
wheeled – *drove*
crash zone – *bedroom*
take the ticket – *believe the story*
go for the show – *believe the lie*
homeboy – *friend from the neighborhood*
down for – *interested in*
sweating – *romantically interested in*
jive – *fake, fraudulent, insincere, misleading*
Chapter Seven

Vocabulary
ashy – looks like skin is covered with ashes
gang-bangers – members of a youth gang

1. One of the themes of this story is the power of drugs to ruin your life. Relate an incident from this chapter illustrating this theme.

_Slam is videotaping life in his neighborhood, when he sees a young woman trying to sell two items to Carl, the man who owns the Curio Shop. The young woman smells terrible, and is obviously on drugs. Slam learns from Carl that she once owned a tailor shop, until she became hooked on drugs. Slam comments that it is hard for him to believe that someone who looks that terrible could have once been a shop owner._

2. Another theme in this novel is the importance of a supportive family. What evidence is there that Slam comes from a strong, supportive family who cares about each other?

_Answers will vary. Example: Slam expresses compassion for his mother, who visits his sick grandmother in the hospital._

3. How does Slam plan to persuade Mtisha to forgive him for kissing Kicky? What is your opinion of his plan?

_Answers will vary. Example: He plans to tell Mtisha how he truly feels about her._

4. Based on the context clues in this chapter, define each of the following slang expressions or words.

_Answers will vary. Examples answers are given as a guide._

copped – steal, seize
look over my shoulder – admire other women
Chapter Eight

1. What information about playing in the NBA does Slam learn from Kenny Stith?

To play in the NBA, a person must not only be a good player, he must also be totally focused on the game. To Slam, this means not having any distractions such as a wife and a family.

2. In this chapter, Slam goes into great detail explaining the reasoning process he uses to take the test. This explanation is similar to the detailed description of the basketball game in Chapter Six. Compare the way Slam approaches basketball with the way he approaches his schoolwork. Why do you think he is successful at playing ball, but unsuccessful at learning math? State a theme for this novel based on this comparison.

Answers will vary. Example: Slam thinks about and practices his basketball skills. During a game he is confident of his abilities and he is focused on the game. Slam is surprised and unprepared for the math test. His reasoning abilities are good, but he lacks the skills he needs to pass the test. Slam does not work at developing these needed math skills the same way he works at improving his basketball skills.

To be successful in life, a person must work and practice to develop valuable skills, rather than relying on natural, raw abilities.
Chapter Nine

1. Why did the coach decide not to start Slam in the game against St. Peter's?

   He does not think Slam is a team player. He wants a whole team on the court, not just one player.

2. What advice does Goldy give to Slam to help him gain Coach Nipper's good will?

   Whenever Coach Nipper puts Slam in the game, Slam must do his very best. Goldy says that the Coach can “…argue with what you say, but nobody can argue with what you accomplish.” (Pg. 112)

3. Slam is largely responsible for his team winning the game against St. Peter's, yet on the way home Slam writes, “I should have been up but I was really down.” (Pg. 117) Why do you think Slam feels this way?

   Slam dreams about becoming a player for the NBA. To accomplish this, he must continue to play basketball. After the game, Slam learns from Goldy that he got a 34 on his math test. He knows that if he fails math, he will be kicked off the team. Also on the way home, Slam and Ducky get into a fight with Jimmy and Nick. He knows that this kind of fighting between team members is not good for the team. If he does not accomplish his dream of playing for the NBA, then Slam believes he will end up being just like the other unemployed young men, hanging around street corners in Harlem.

4. Mtisha calls Slam after the game. He tries to make up with her, and she seems to be ready to accept his apology. During the conversation she says,

   “Just trying to figure out how we all fit together,” she said. “You know, me, you, Ice, Bianca, all of us. Cutting people out of your life is easy, keeping them in is hard.” (Pg. 121)

   Who do you think she is considering cutting out of her life and why?

   Answers will vary. Example: Mtisha is going to college. She is not going to spend her life on a street corner in Harlem. She realizes that maintaining contact with people like Ice and Bianca, who are taking a different path, will be difficult. She is also hinting that, should Slam decide to take the same downward path, she will find it difficult to keep him in her life.
5. Based on the context clues in this chapter, define each of the following slang expressions or words.

*Answers will vary. Examples are given as a guide.*

- **throw down with** – get into an argument or dispute with
- **light him up** – beat him up
- **work my show** – strive to be attractive in a romantic way

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**Chapter Ten**

**Vocabulary**

- **bodega** – a small grocery store, wine shop, or bar
- **doo-rag** – a bandanna worn around the head

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1. What is Slam saying about manhood in the following excerpt from this chapter?

   “But in the hood that manhood thing was like that card game they play on the corners downtown. Dude got three cards, two black and one red, and you got to find the red one. He mixes them up and you know you’re not going to find the right one. People telling you that this ain’t about manhood and that ain’t about manhood and you end up trying to figure out what you got that is about manhood.” (Pgs. 126-127)

   *Answers will vary. Example: Slam does not understand what it takes to be a man, and he recognizes that whatever it takes, it will not be easy.*

2. What evidence is there in this chapter to convince Slam that Ice is a drug dealer?

   *A drug addict approaches Ice asking for drugs. Ice is wearing a cellular phone and a beeper. He is also wearing expensive clothes.*

3. What do you think the “wind” in the following excerpt from this chapter might stand for or represent?

   “For a while I thought something was following me, but when I turned around there wasn’t nothing there. Still I couldn’t shake the feeling and kept looking over my shoulder. Maybe it was the way that people turned into shadows as it got darker or maybe it was just the wind at my back, blowing through the hood like it owned it, making things colder, reminding me that it owned the streets.” (Pgs. 134-135)

   *Answers will vary. Example: The wind represents fear and hopelessness. Slam is afraid his future will not be any better than the other young men who stand on the street corners in the hood.*
4. Based on the context clues in this chapter define each of the following slang expressions or words.

*Answers will vary. Examples are given as a guide.*

- lame – stupid
- ace – best friend
- dime – ten dollars
- reefer – a marijuana cigarette
- dress down – wearing fine, expensive clothes
- give someone their propers – give them respect and the benefit of the doubt

**Chapter Eleven**

1. Nick tries to talk to Slam during lunch. Why do you think he does this?

*Answers will vary. Example: Nick does not want to fight with Slam so he is trying to come to an understanding with him.*

2. For what reasons does Slam believe Ducky can be a better basketball player?

*Ducky demonstrates to Slam that he has courage, when he tackles Nick to keep him from interfering with Slam’s fight with Jimmy. Slam believes that anyone with that much courage can be a good basketball player.*

3. How does Slam react when he learns Derek has lost the video camera?

*At first he just laughs, because he feels he has to laugh, cry or scream. Then he goes to Carl’s to see if anyone tried to sell him a video camera.*

4. Why does Slam believe that crack is scarier than AIDS?

*Slam understands how a person contracts AIDS but he does not understand how crack gains so much control and power over the lives of those who use it.*

5. Mtisha wants Slam to try to solve a math problem. Slam tells her he does not know how to do it and does not even try. Why do you suppose he behaves in this way?

*Answers will vary. Example: Slam does not want to appear to be stupid in front of Mtisha, so rather risk embarrassment or shame, he refuses to try solving the problem.*
6. Based on the context clues in this chapter define the following slang expression.

_Answers will vary. Example is given as a guide._

*cracking on someone – laughing at someone*

**Chapter Twelve**

**Vocabulary**

elevate – increase

1. How does Slam feel when Nick tells him a college basketball scout is coming to see Nick play?

_Slam is hurt because Nick is getting a chance to impress a scout. Slam wants that opportunity for himself._

2. Cite an incident from this chapter to prove the following statement. Nick is a team player who puts the welfare of the team above his own personal interests.

_Nick asks Slam what they can do to win the basketball game. Slam says to “Give me the ball,” and Nick agrees. He instructs the other team members to get the ball to Slam. Nick does this, even though he knows there is a scout in the audience who is at the game to watch Nick play._

3. Why do Nick and the other members of the team refuse to shake hands with the Trinity players?

_Nick makes a basket just as time runs out. The referees declare the basket to be invalid, because time has run out. Nick and the others do not shake hands, because they believe they are the winning team._

**Chapter Thirteen**

1. Even though Slam’s team loses the game to Trinity, several nice things happen to Slam in this chapter. List two good incidents from this chapter that help to boost Slam’s spirits.

_Mtisha figures out a way to help Slam with his math. Both Slam and his father are relieved that he does not need the tutor. Mr. Parrish likes Slam’s video enough to suggest that he complete it and enter it in a statewide arts contest._
2. Sometimes the themes for a novel are hinted at through the conversations of the characters, often a minor character. Review the conversation between Slam and Goldy on pages 177 and 178, and the advice Goldy’s father gave Goldy. Based on this advice, state a theme for this story.

Answers will vary. Example: To be successful, a person must find something that he loves to do, and then work to become the very best at it.

3. Why do you think the coach at Brown is interested in Nick, but not interested in Slam?

Nick is a team player who has good basketball skills, but he also has high test scores and good grades in school.

4. Based on the context clues in this chapter, define each of the following slang expressions or words.

Answers will vary. Examples are given as a guide.

- fat – having money, refers to having a wallet full or fat with money
- jive turkey – lying jerk
- his program – his life

Chapter Fourteen

1. One of the themes in this story is the importance of a strong supportive family to help a young person succeed in life. Cite an incident from this chapter that helps to illustrate this theme.

Answers will vary. Example: Ice does not have a real home. The corner of the building where Ice lived as a child fell off, so the family had to move in with his aunt. Later, his father is stabbed to death. Unlike Slam, Ice does not have a stable, supportive family. Ice is turning to drugs, while Slam is struggling to find a way to make a better future for himself. Both boys were raised like brothers, but each boy is taking a different path in life.

2. Find an example of an allusion in this chapter.

Ice refers to a famous white basketball player, named Larry Bird.

3. What does Slam learn from Willie King?

Willie King is a good basketball player, but he ends up in jail. Slam learns that being good at basketball did not help Willie to make a better life for himself.
4. Slam watches as Ice gives bystanders money to help the heart attack victim. He is impressed with the way Ice handles the situation. Afterwards, Ice tells Slam that he loves him and gives Slam a big hug. After leaving Ice, Slam thinks, “What I said and what I should have said ran through my mind and it was all weak. Me and Ice were edging in on a truth and we both knew it. That was what he was really saying when he said he loved me and when we hugged.” (Pg. 187)

What is the “truth” Slam refers to in the above passage?

Answers will vary. Example: One possible answer is that Ice knows that Slam will not approve of, or accept, his drug dealing. He knows that he and Slam can no longer be like brothers. When he tells Slam that he loves him and gives him a hug, Ice is saying good-bye to his old friend and to the childhood they shared. Another answer is that playing basketball is not going to help either Ice or Slam escape the realities of life in the hood.

Chapter Fifteen

1. Why is Slam disappointed in Ice’s game, even though Carver beats Trinity?

Slam notices that Ice looks tired, and he does not seem to care that Brothers slams the ball. Even though the game is won, Slam believes Ice should still be trying to keep Brothers from slamming the ball. Ice should have too much pride in his personal game to let Brothers insult him in this way.

2. Mtisha says to Slam, “How come every time I talk to you I feel my mouth is too big?… And I got to watch what comes out?” (Pg. 197) What do you think Mtisha is afraid of saying to Slam?

Answers will vary. Example: Mtisha is in love with Slam. Slam makes it clear that he wants to spend more romantic time with Mtisha. She is afraid that she will tell him that she also wants a more physical relationship. Mtisha wants to go to college, and she does not want to become pregnant or stay tied to the life in the hood.
Chapter Sixteen

Vocabulary
bodacious – outstanding in a showy way; splendid
forensics – the application of scientific or medical knowledge to investigate crime

1. Cite an incident from this chapter to support the following statement: Slam benefits from the support of his loving, stable family.

Answers will vary. Example: Slam feels good about himself when he interacts with his younger brother. He enjoys being the wiser and generous older brother when he forgives Derek for losing the video camera, and he generously agrees to let him use it again.

2. How does Slam feel when he reads his PSAT scores?

Slam is relieved that he scored above 700, so he will be eligible to accept a basketball scholarship if one if offered to him. He also believes that he would do better on the test if he took it again because, Mtisha has been helping him with his math.

3. Slam uses several slang expressions in the following passage. What is Slam saying about the game with Hunter?

“The truth is that my game is my fame and when I made the scene with my gangster lean I knew I was crazy good and on the money.” (Pg. 201)

Answers may vary. Example: Slam is known to the other team members because of his reputation as a good basketball player. He is happy to know that the other team already respects his tough game. Slam knows that he will have a good game when he is playing against a player or a team that feels threatened or intimidated by his skills.

4. Slam is frustrated and angry when the coach once again decides not to start him in the game against Hunter. What advice does Goldy give to Slam? In what sense can this advice apply to life in general, as well as to a basketball game?

Goldy tells Slam to play his best basketball for himself, not for the coach. He says that life is not fair, but Slam must not let anyone else, including his coach, keep him from doing his best.

Answers will vary. Example: A person must work to accomplish his goals, and not allow himself to be discouraged by the unfair judgments and actions of others.
5. One of the author’s writing techniques is to use interesting similes to describe people and places in the story. Find an example of an interesting simile in this chapter.

“Then, when we hit 125th Street we saw this devastated-looking chick get on the train. It was cold but she was sweating and I knew she was a head. What she looked like most was a blackbird that was caught in the rain.” (Pg. 210)

6. Cite an incident from the chapter to illustrate the following theme: Drugs ruin the lives of the people who sell them as well as the lives of those who use them.

Slam feels sad when he sees a young woman who is addicted to drugs get on the subway train.

7. Why does Slam say it is “getting to be easier hanging with Ducky than it was with Ice?” (Pg. 210)

Slam does not want to face the reality that Ice is dealing drugs. Being with Ducky is not as scary as being with Ice.

8. A coming of age novel is a story in which the main character or characters grow, mature, or understand the world in adult terms. What evidence is there in this chapter that Slam is beginning to understand the world in adult terms?

Slam reflects on the game and on the advice Goldy gives him about life. He concludes that life is not easy. This reflection shows that Slam is beginning to understand how to handle difficulties and injustice.

Chapter Seventeen

1. Why does Slam nearly punch Mr. Parrish?

Slam does not turn in his English paper. Mr. Parrish suggests that Slam is just taking up space in school, and he should go stand on the street corner because that is all Slam seems to want out of life. Mr. Parrish is insulting and cruel in the way he talks to Slam. Slam loses his temper and nearly punches Mr. Parrish. He is angry because he knows in his heart that he may one day end up standing on the street corner, and he does not want to be reminded of this reality by Mr. Parrish. He considers Mr. Parrish’s behavior to be disrespectful.
2. Sometimes minor characters can hint at themes within a novel. Read the following passage where Goldy is trying to help Slam to understand life, and then state a theme based on Goldy’s words.

“The only difference between on the court and off the court is that everybody is in the game off the court. You will play, and you will win or lose. There’s nobody on the bench, nobody sitting it out. You’re in the game, Slam. You’re in it whether you want to be or not. A lot of people fool themselves and say they’re just not going to play. Believe me, it don’t work that way.” (Pg. 218)

Answers will vary. Example: Just as a basketball player must work at his basketball skills to be successful in a game, a person must work at getting an education and learning how to get along with others if he wants to be successful in life.

3. For what reasons does Slam decide to find Mr. Parrish and apologize to him?

Slam understands that he, as well as Mr. Parrish, behaved badly in class. He also understands that he wants to stay in school. Slam decides to accept responsibility for his mistake and apologize to Mr. Parrish.

4. In what ways are Mr. Green and Brothers, the good basketball players on Trinity’s team, alike?

Mr. Green threatens to keep Slam from graduating. Slam understands that Mr. Green is trying to intimidate him, just as Brothers talked on the basketball court to try to intimidate Slam. Brothers has the skills to back up his bragging, and Mr. Green has the power to stop Slam from graduating.

5. Why does Slam feel more comfortable on the basketball court than he does in his academic classes?

Slam already knows how to win a basketball game. He does not yet understand how to win off the court.

6. Based on the context clues in this chapter, define each of the following slang expressions or words.

Answers will vary. Examples are given as a guide.

tough – good
puts his mouth on you – lectures you
hawk – wind
dig it – like it
rock his jaw – hit him in the jaw
sky – jump very high
Chapter Eighteen

1. Miss Fowell compliments Slam on his videotape, but then she lectures him about keeping the rest of his life together. Slam asks her why adults lecture students. What is her reply?

Miss Fowell remembers the lectures she received as a student. Now that she is a grown-up, she realizes that the lessons the adults were trying to teach her are true. When adults lecture youth, they are passing on these valuable life lessons.

2. List two positive incidents from this chapter that show that Slam is good in some areas of school.

Miss Fowell tells Slam that Mr. Parrish still likes Slam's videotape, even though Slam misbehaved in class. The art teacher, Mr. Kenny, compliments Slam on his portrait of Mtisha.

3. For what reasons is the game against Carver important?

If Latimer beats Carver, then Latimer will go to the citywide Tournament of Champions. Goldy also tells Slam that the game will be taped. Twelve colleges called and asked for copies of the tape, so they can evaluate Ice's playing abilities in competition. This is a compliment for the Latimer team, because the colleges consider them to be good competitors against Carver.

Chapter Nineteen

1. Why does the coach decide to assign Slam, instead of Nick, the job of guarding Ice?

The colleges called the coach and asked him to play Slam against Ice, so they can evaluate Ice's playing abilities.

2. What is Slam's strategy for guarding Ice and keeping Ice's game under control?

Slam plans to guard Ice very closely all of the game, making Ice work for every play he makes.

3. In what way do the referees contribute to the fast, tough pace of the game?

They do not call touch fouls.
4. How does Ice respond to Slam’s determined defense?

   *Halfway through the second half of the game, Ice stops trying to beat Slam.*

5. Why do you think Slam is able to defeat Ice in this game?

   *Slam tries harder and stretches himself to do his very best during the game. Ice also tries, but he does not dig deep within himself to make the extra effort needed to win.*

6. After the game, the teachers and students come into the locker room to congratulate the team. Slam writes,

   “The thought came to me that we had won, and maybe they wouldn’t have been there if we had lost. Maybe that was something to think about for the off-court game, too.”
   (Pgs. 247-248)

What do you think Slam is saying in the above passage about life in general?

   *Answers will vary. Example: Perhaps Slam realizes in this moment that if he succeeds in life, off the court, there will be others who will be there to celebrate and share in his success. By the same token, if he is unsuccessful in his off-court game, he risks losing his supportive friends or family.*

Chapter Twenty

1. Slam suspects that Ice is dealing drugs. Why then does he get upset when he witnesses Ice giving some drugs to the girl on the roof? How does Slam react?

   *Answers will vary. Example: Slam tried to pretend that Ice was not dealing drugs, because he did not want to believe his best friend was a drug dealer. When he sees Ice give the girl drugs, he can no longer fool himself. He is hurt and deals with this hurt by fighting Ice.*

2. Based on the context clues in this chapter, define each of the following slang expressions or words.

   *Answers will vary. Examples are given as a guide.*

   righteous – good, excellent
   stone killer outfit – sexy, beautiful
   part of the life – dealing drugs
Chapter Twenty-One

1. Find an example of an allusion in this chapter.

   *Slam refers to Malcolm X when he thinks about Ice and the drug dealing life he has chosen for himself. Malcolm X once said, “that when he was preaching on the corners in Harlem he was fishing for the dead.”* (Pg. 262)

2. Cite a passage from this chapter to prove or disprove the following statement: Ice begins dealing drugs because he gives up on life.

   “Like, you live there and you got roaches and you got crack and you got streets that don’t get cleaned up and you got people giving up on life and that’s what it’s all about.” (Pg. 262)

3. Slam reflects on what he has learned about life in the following passage. Based on his words, briefly discuss how well the following characters from the story fulfill this view of life.

   “What was happening was that the clock was still running, like Goldy had said it would, and we had to keep on keeping on the best way we could.” (Pg. 265)

   *Grandmother:* Despite her serious illness and old age, Grandmother continues to live her life as fully as possible, rather than give in to the illness and become an invalid.

   *Moms:* Moms must cope with the prospect of losing her mother to cancer, her husband’s occasional unemployment and subsequent drinking, and the challenges of raising two sons in Harlem. She is a strong woman who maintains her sense of humor in the face of all of these challenges.

   *Mtisha:* Mitisha is raised in Harlem, but she is working hard to get an education, so she can go to college and make a life for herself.

4. What evidence is there that the coach’s attitude toward Greg Harris has changed?

   *The coach calls him Slam during practice.*
Wrap-up Questions

Note to the teacher: The answers to these questions will vary. Any well-supported answer is acceptable.

1. Several times in this novel, Slam writes about the scenes of life in Harlem that he is videotaping. What does Slam learn about his neighborhood from viewing the people living there through the lens of the camera?

2. List three incidents from the novel that illustrate that this is a coming of age novel for Slam.

3. In your opinion, would the ending of this book be different if Slam had eased off Ice during the basketball game, so his best friend would look good for the college scouts? If you were in Slam’s position, would you have played your best? Why do you think Slam put everything he had into the game?

4. Why might this novel be titled “Looking for the Inch” instead of Slam?!

5. Describe how Slam’s confidence in his basketball playing at the end of this novel supports the idea that he has come of age and learned valuable life lessons.
Chapter One

Vocabulary
prima donnas – temperamental, vain, or arrogant people

1. Why does Slam believe that the only time in his life that he is “being for real” is when he is playing basketball? (Pg. 1)

2. How does Slam feel when Mr. Tate calls his mother into the office for a conference?

3. Briefly describe each of the following characters introduced in this chapter. Include Slam’s feelings about each character.

   Mr. Harris:

   Derek:

   Moms:
4. Find an example of humor in this chapter.

5. What compromise does Slam agree to, after talking to his mother about his grades?

6. For what reason(s) does Slam make a poor impression on the coach, Mr. Nipper, during the basketball try out?

7. How does Slam rate the playing abilities of the following boys?
   
   Ducky:

   Jimmy Ellis:

   Nick:

8. “Local color writing” refers to a kind of fiction that is devoted to capturing the unique customs, manners, speech, folklore, and other qualities, of a particular regional community, usually in humorous short stories. To what extent is this chapter an example of local color writing?
9. Find a passage in the story that illustrates the author’s use of sensory images to describe Slam’s community. Sensory images are descriptive text, using details from the five senses to help describe the subject.

10. Slang is highly informal speech, outside of conventional or standard usage, and consists both of coined words and phrases. *Slam!* is told in a first person narration by the protagonist. He tells the story in his own language, using many slang expressions. Based on the context clues in the story, define each of the following slang expressions or words.

   tag –

   turned out –

   scoping –

   fly –

   throw it down on you –

   diss –
Chapter Two

Vocabulary

crosstown – located on the other side of a town or city
desperation – recklessness resulting from despair
stoop – a small platform with steps at the door of a house

1. Why is Slam attending Latimer instead of Carver High School?

2. How does Slam feel about his new school?

3. Told in the first person, the author uses many different techniques to add interest to Slam’s descriptions of his surroundings. One of these techniques is to personify an object or an animal by giving it human characteristics. For example: *The pig laughed all the way to the barn.* Find an example of personification in this chapter.

4. For what reasons does Slam admire Ice? Why does he feel that he and Ice are growing apart, as they get older?

5. Ice wants to go shopping for a beeper. Why does Slam believe Ice wants a beeper?

6. Briefly describe Mtisha. How does Slam feel about Mtisha?

7. What warning does Mtisha give Slam concerning his friend, Ice? Why does Slam have trouble believing that Ice is in trouble?
8. List three dangers Ice, Slam, and the other young people face as part of their everyday lives, growing up on Harlem. List two positive aspects of Slam's life in Harlem.

9. Based on the context clues in this chapter, define each of the following slang expressions or words.

- tight –
- scoping out –
- give some sugar –
- goofed behind it –
- hoop –
- get down with his hands –
- hood –
- wasted –
- hanging loose –
- rock trade –
- homey –
- a heavy dame –
- being slick –
- jams –
- forty –
- peeping –
- string cut loose –
- crack head –
- wedgies –
Chapter Three

Vocabulary
collard greens – a vegetable
oxtail – the tail of an ox used in soup or stew

1. What advice does Grandma Ellie give Slam concerning his schoolwork? How does Slam react to this advice?

2. Based on the context clues in this chapter, define each of the following slang expressions or words.

   raggedy –

   tore down –

Chapter Four

Vocabulary
Durer – A German painter and wood engraver, 1471 - 1528
interpret – to explain the meaning of
latitude – freedom from narrow restrictions
legitimate – reasonable, logical, justified

1. How does Slam feel about the basketball practices? Why does Slam walk away from the second team practice?

2. What evidence is there, in this chapter, that Slam is a good brother to Derek?
3. Describe Mr. Goldstein (Goldy). What evidence is there that Mr. Goldstein cares about and is trying to understand Slam, so that he can help him to adjust to Latimer?

4. What is Slam’s dream for his future?

5. Why does Slam listen to music instead of working on his math homework?

6. Based on the context clues in this chapter, define each of the following slang expressions or words.

   showboat –

   brainiac –

   tough body –

   give someone a play –

   scrub –

   whack –
Chapter Five

1. How does Slam feel about posing for Karen’s sketch?

2. Why is Slam called to the school office? How does Slam react to Mr. Tate’s proposal?

3. What is Slam referring to in the following quote from this chapter?
   “But if I can't fly don't be taking me to your cloud.” (Pg. 52)

4. For what reason does Slam warn his mother not to tell Pops about Mr. Randall?

5. How does Slam feel about not starting in the first basketball game with Regis?

6. How does Slam feel when he dunks the ball? Why do you think he feels this way?
Chapter Six

Vocabulary
sienna – yellowish-brown

1. After winning the game with Regis, how do the other players treat Slam? How does the coach respond to Slam's performance in the game?

2. Why do you think Slam kisses Kicky in the backseat of Ice's car even though he is in love with Mtisha?

3. What evidence is there that Mtisha understands Slam's love for basketball?

4. Describe Marjorie Flatley and the school project she and Slam are going to work on together.

5. Some critics believe the following statement is a theme for this story. Find an incident in this chapter supporting the theme.

   Theme: To be a success, a person must first believe he can succeed and then work hard to achieve his goals.

6. What evidence is there that Slam feels some prejudice from the Latimer faculty? What evidence is there that the faculty cares about Slam and is interested in Slam's future?
7. Why do you think the coach asks Nick to go one-on-one with Slam?

8. One of the themes of this story is the importance of friends in a young man's life. For each of the following incidents, write a brief statement about how each illustrates the theme of friendship. The first one is done for you as an example.

Slam feeds Ducky the ball during basketball practice.
_Slam is showing his friendship for Ducky by helping him overcome his fear of handling the ball. Slam hopes that by feeding Ducky the ball in practice, Ducky will improve his play enough to remain on the team._

Karen asks Slam to pose for her.

Ice encourages Slam to ride around in Ice's big car after the game, instead of going home.

Slam does not act on Mtisha's warning that Ice may be dealing drugs.

Mtisha seems to understand when Slam explains to her how much he loves the feel of the pebbles on the basketball.

Jimmy warns Slam that the coach asked Nick to go one-on-one with him, and that the coach believes Slam is not a team player.
Based on the context clues in this chapter, define each of the following slang expressions or words.

- looking lame –
- double deal –
- crib –
- is on the program –
- wheeled –
- crash zone –
- take the ticket –
- go for the show –
- homeboy –
- down for –
- sweating –
- jive –
Chapter Seven

Vocabulary
ashy – looks like skin is covered with ashes
gang-bangers – members of a youth gang

1. One of the themes of this story is the power of drugs to ruin your life. Relate an incident from this chapter illustrating this theme.

2. Another theme in this novel is the importance of a supportive family. What evidence is there that Slam comes from a strong, supportive family who cares about each other?

3. How does Slam plan to persuade Mtisha to forgive him for kissing Kicky? What is your opinion of his plan?

4. Based on the context clues in this chapter, define each of the following slang expressions or words.

   copped –

   look over my shoulder –
Chapter Eight

1. What information about playing in the NBA does Slam learn from Kenny Stith?

2. In this chapter, Slam goes into great detail explaining the reasoning process he uses to take the test. This explanation is similar to the detailed description of the basketball game in Chapter Six. Compare the way Slam approaches basketball with the way he approaches his schoolwork. Why do you think he is successful at playing ball, but unsuccessful at learning math? State a theme for this novel based on this comparison.

Chapter Nine

1. Why did the coach decide not to start Slam in the game against St. Peter's?

2. What advice does Goldy give to Slam to help him gain Coach Nipper's good will?

3. Slam is largely responsible for his team winning the game against St. Peter's, yet on the way home Slam writes, “I should have been up but I was really down.” (Pg. 117) Why do you think Slam feels this way?
4. Mtisha calls Slam after the game. He tries to make up with her, and she seems to be ready to accept his apology. During the conversation she says,
   “Just trying to figure out how we all fit together,” she said. “You know, me, you, Ice, Bianca, all of us. Cutting people out of your life is easy, keeping them in is hard.” (Pg. 121)

   Who do you think she is considering cutting out of her life and why?

5. Based on the context clues in this chapter, define each of the following slang expressions or words.

   throw down with –
   light him up –
   work my show –

Chapter Ten

Vocabulary
bodega –a small grocery story, wine shop, or bar
doo-rag –a bandanna worn around the head

1. What is Slam saying about manhood in the following excerpt from this chapter?

   “But in the hood that manhood thing was like that card game they play on the corners downtown. Dude got three cards, two black and one red, and you got to find the red one. He mixes them up and you know you’re not going to find the right one. People telling you that this ain’t about manhood and that ain’t about manhood and you end up trying to figure out what you got that is about manhood.” (Pgs. 126-127)

2. What evidence is there in this chapter to convince Slam that Ice is a drug dealer?
3. What do you think the “wind” in the following excerpt from this chapter might stand for or represent?

“For a while I thought something was following me, but when I turned around there wasn't nothing there. Still I couldn't shake the feeling and kept looking over my shoulder. Maybe it was the way that people turned into shadows as it got darker or maybe it was just the wind at my back, blowing through the hood like it owned it, making things colder, reminding me that it owned the streets.” (Pgs. 134-135)

4. Based on the context clues in this chapter define each of the following slang expressions or words.

lame –
ace –
dime –
reefer –
dress down –
give someone their propers –
Chapter Eleven

1. Nick tries to talk to Slam during lunch. Why do you think he does this?

2. For what reasons does Slam believe Ducky can be a better basketball player?

3. How does Slam react when he learns Derek has lost the video camera?

4. Why does Slam believe that crack is scarier than AIDS?

5. Mtisha wants Slam to try to solve a math problem. Slam tells her he does not know how to do it and does not even try. Why do you suppose he behaves in this way?

6. Based on the context clues in this chapter define the following slang expression.

   cracking on someone –
Chapter Twelve

Vocabulary

elevate – increase

1. How does Slam feel when Nick tells him a college basketball scout is coming to see Nick play?

2. Cite an incident from this chapter to prove the following statement. Nick is a team player who puts the welfare of the team above his own personal interests.

3. Why do Nick and the other members of the team refuse to shake hands with the Trinity players?

Chapter Thirteen

1. Even though Slam’s team loses the game to Trinity, several nice things happen to Slam in this chapter. List two good incidents from this chapter that help to boost Slam’s spirits.

2. Sometimes the themes for a novel are hinted at through the conversations of the characters, often a minor character. Review the conversation between Slam and Goldy on pages 177 and 178, and the advice Goldy’s father gave Goldy. Based on this advice, state a theme for this story.
3. Why do you think the coach at Brown is interested in Nick, but not interested in Slam?

4. Based on the context clues in this chapter, define each of the following slang expressions or words.

   fat –

   jive turkey –

   his program –
Chapter Fourteen

1. One of the themes in this story is the importance of a strong supportive family to help a young person succeed in life. Cite an incident from this chapter that helps to illustrate this theme.

2. Find an example of an allusion in this chapter.

3. What does Slam learn from Willie King?

4. Slam watches as Ice gives bystanders money to help the heart attack victim. He is impressed with the way Ice handles the situation. Afterwards, Ice tells Slam that he loves him and gives Slam a big hug. After leaving Ice, Slam thinks,

   “What I said and what I should have said ran through my mind and it was all weak. Me and Ice were edging in on a truth and we both knew it. That was what he was really saying when he said he loved me and when we hugged.” (Pg. 187)

   What is the “truth” Slam refers to in the above passage?

Chapter Fifteen

1. Why is Slam disappointed in Ice’s game, even though Carver beats Trinity?

2. Mtisha says to Slam, “How come every time I talk to you I feel my mouth is too big?… And I got to watch what comes out?” (Pg. 197) What do you think Mtisha is afraid of saying to Slam?
Chapter Sixteen

Vocabulary

bodacious – outstanding in a showy way; splendid
forensics – the application of scientific or medical knowledge to investigate crime

1. Cite an incident from this chapter to support the following statement: Slam benefits from the support of his loving, stable family.

2. How does Slam feel when he reads his PSAT scores?

3. Slam uses several slang expressions in the following passage. What is Slam saying about the game with Hunter?

“The truth is that my game is my fame and when I made the scene with my gangster lean I knew I was crazy good and on the money.” (Pg. 201)

4. Slam is frustrated and angry when the coach once again decides not to start him in the game against Hunter. What advice does Goldy give to Slam? In what sense can this advice apply to life in general, as well as to a basketball game?

5. One of the author’s writing techniques is to use interesting similes to describe people and places in the story. Find an example of an interesting simile in this chapter.

6. Cite an incident from the chapter to illustrate the following theme: Drugs ruin the lives of the people who sell them as well as the lives of those who use them.
7. Why does Slam say it is “getting to be easier hanging with Ducky than it was with Ice?” (Pg. 210)

8. A coming of age novel is a story in which the main character or characters grow, mature, or understand the world in adult terms. What evidence is there in this chapter that Slam is beginning to understand the world in adult terms?

Chapter Seventeen

1. Why does Slam nearly punch Mr. Parrish?

2. Sometimes minor characters can hint at themes within a novel. Read the following passage where Goldy is trying to help Slam to understand life, and then state a theme based on Goldy’s words.

“The only difference between on the court and off the court is that everybody is in the game off the court. You will play, and you will win or lose. There’s nobody on the bench, nobody sitting it out. You’re in the game, Slam. You’re in it whether you want to be or not. A lot of people fool themselves and say they’re just not going to play. Believe me, it don’t work that way.” (Pg. 218)

3. For what reasons does Slam decide to find Mr. Parrish and apologize to him?

4. In what ways are Mr. Green and Brothers, the good basketball players on Trinity’s team, alike?
5. Why does Slam feel more comfortable on the basketball court than he does in his academic classes?

6. Based on the context clues in this chapter, define each of the following slang expressions or words.

   tough –
   puts his mouth on you –
   hawk –
   dig it –
   rock his jaw –
   sky –

Chapter Eighteen

1. Miss Fowell compliments Slam on his videotape, but then she lectures him about keeping the rest of his life together. Slam asks her why adults lecture students. What is her reply?

2. List two positive incidents from this chapter that show that Slam is good in some areas of school.

3. For what reasons is the game against Carver important?
Chapter Nineteen

1. Why does the coach decide to assign Slam, instead of Nick, the job of guarding Ice?

2. What is Slam's strategy for guarding Ice and keeping Ice's game under control?

3. In what way do the referees contribute to the fast, tough pace of the game?

4. How does Ice respond to Slam's determined defense?

5. Why do you think Slam is able to defeat Ice in this game?

6. After the game, the teachers and students come into the locker room to congratulate the team. Slam writes,

   "The thought came to me that we had won, and maybe they wouldn't have been there if we had lost. Maybe that was something to think about for the off-court game, too." (Pgs. 247-248)

   What do you think Slam is saying in the above passage about life in general?
Chapter Twenty

1. Slam suspects that Ice is dealing drugs. Why then does he get upset when he witnesses Ice giving some drugs to the girl on the roof? How does Slam react?

2. Based on the context clues in this chapter, define each of the following slang expressions or words.

   righteous –

   stone killer outfit –

   part of the life –

Chapter Twenty-One

1. Find an example of an allusion in this chapter.

2. Cite a passage from this chapter to prove or disprove the following statement: Ice begins dealing drugs because he gives up on life.
3. Slam reflects on what he has learned about life in the following passage. Based on his words, briefly discuss how well the following characters from the story fulfill this view of life.

“What was happening was that the clock was still running, like Goldy had said it would, and we had to keep on keeping on the best way we could.” (Pg. 265)

Grandmother:

Moms:

Mtisha:

4. What evidence is there that the coach's attitude toward Greg Harris has changed?
Wrap-up Questions

1. Several times in this novel, Slam writes about the scenes of life in Harlem that he is videotaping. What does Slam learn about his neighborhood from viewing the people living there through the lens of the camera?

2. List three incidents from the novel that illustrate that this is a coming of age novel for Slam.

3. In your opinion, would the ending of this book be different if Slam had eased off Ice during the basketball game, so his best friend would look good for the college scouts? If you were in Slam’s position, would you have played your best? Why do you think Slam put everything he had into the game?

4. Why might this novel be titled “Looking for the Inch” instead of Slam?

5. Describe how Slam’s confidence in his basketball playing at the end of this novel supports the idea that he has come of age and learned valuable life lessons.
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