



Slam! by Walter Dean Myers

Subjects: Basketball; African Americans; High schools; Prejudices

Awards: Coretta Scott King Award Winner, Best Books for Young Adults

Book List: Gifted

Props: Basketball



(Bring out basketball) Basketball is his thing. He can hoop. Case closed. He is six foot four and he's got the moves, the eye, and the heart. You can take his game to the bank and wait around for the interest. With him it's not like playing a game, it's like the only time he is being for real. Bringing the ball down the court makes him feel like a bird that just learned to fly. He sees his guys moving down in front of him and everything feels and looks right. Patterns come up and a small buzz comes into his head that starts to build up and he knows it won't end until the ball swishes through the net. They call him Slam. Yeah, that's it, Slam. *(Put ball down)*

But without the ball, without the floorboards under his feet, without the mid-court line that takes him halfway home, things are hard. Greg Harris, Slam, lives with his Moms and Pops and little brother Derek in an apartment on the second floor. He and his Moms and Derek are like a real family; so is his Pops when he's acting right, which means when he's working. When he's working he's like laid back and mostly off the bottle. When he's not working he gets into these moods and sometimes he gets nasty. It bothers Slam and when something bothers him, he keeps thinking about it. Like he's replaying a tape over and over. Sometimes it keeps him up late at night. But, actually that's not all bad. He likes to lay in the dark and listen to the sounds coming up from the street. As he lies in bed he can tell just what time it is by what he hears going on down below. When it's late night he hears the sound of car doors and people talking and music spilling out the latest tunes. When it rains the tires hiss on the street. If there's a fight he hears the voices rising and catching each other up. The sound of broken glass can cut through all other noises, even if it's just a bottle of wine somebody dropped.

And behind all the sounds there's always the sirens, bringing their bad news from far off and making him hold his breath until they pass so he knows it ain't any of his people who's getting arrested or being taken to the hospital.

But his Pops isn't his only worry. In his junior year, Slam was transferred to a new school and his grades are not what they should be. His best friend, Ice, is hanging with the wrong people. His girl, Mtisha is pressuring him to talk to Ice about his new friends and to get his grades up. And Mr. Nipper the basketball coach at his new school is giving him attitude. *(Bring out basketball)* At the try-outs the coach pointed to him and told him to go in at center. Slam replied, "I don't play center. I'm a guard." Coach said, "then you just sit right there." They ran the whole practice and he sat there. He guesses he was supposed to run on over and say he was going to go in at center. But center wasn't his game, he's a guard. He plays facing the hoop and either dishing off or busting a move for the basket. Play him weak and he will defiantly throw it down on you. Slam! That's his game, and it's sweet. As far as he's concerned, when you love something, either a game or playing a horn or whatever it is you do, after awhile you know what it's about. And what his game is about is something serious. *(Put down basketball)*

Slam will make the team but his worries won't end there. Life off the court is hard. Slam has choices to make and he's got to be a man. He has the moves on the court but when he finds himself going one-on-one with his own future, will he make the right move? *(Hold up book)* *Slam!* by Walter Dean Myers.