Instructor’s Guide For

The Other Wes Moore
One Name, Two Fates

By Wes Moore

Prepared by:
The Office of First Year Initiatives
University of Louisville

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**Disclaimer:** *The Other Wes Moore* chronicles the lives of two men, both named Wes Moore. This can create some confusion when trying to distinguish one Wes from the other. There is no perfect way to clearly refer to each Wes throughout this document. Although not ideal, we decided that the Wes Moore that wrote the book will be referred to as “Author Wes” and the Wes Moore currently imprisoned will be referred to as “The Other Wes.” “Author Wes” has said before that each of them in a different context is “The Other” Wes Moore. Exploring who “The Other” Wes Moore is, and what makes someone “other,” could be a great discussion topic for your class!
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Wes Moore is a youth advocate, Army combat veteran, and author. He graduated Phi Theta Kappa as a commissioned officer from Valley Forge Military College in 1998, and Phi Beta Kappa from Johns Hopkins University in 2001 with a bachelor’s degree in International Relations. He completed a Master of Literature in International Relations from Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar in 2004.

Wes was a paratrooper and Captain in the United States Army, serving a combat tour of duty in Afghanistan with the elite 1st Brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division in 2005–2006. Wes spearheaded the American strategic support plan for the Afghan Reconciliation Program that unites former insurgents with the new Afghan Government. A White House Fellow from 2006–2007, Wes served as a Special Assistant to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Following his time at the White House, Wes became an investment professional in New York at Citigroup, focusing on global technology and alternative investments. Moore was named one of Ebony magazine’s “Top 30 Leaders Under 30” for 2007 and Crain’s New York Business’ “40 Under 40 Rising Stars” in 2009.

Wes is passionate about supporting U.S. veterans and examining the roles education, mentoring, and public service play in the lives of American youth. He serves on the board of the Iraq Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) and founded an organization called STAND! through Johns Hopkins that works with Baltimore youth involved in the criminal justice system. He has been featured by such media outlets as People Magazine, The New York Times, The Washington Post, CSPAN, and MSNBC.

Wes Moore was born in 1978 and was three years old when his father, a respected radio and television host, died in front of him. His mother, hoping for a better future for her family, made great sacrifices to send Wes and his sisters to private school. Caught between two worlds—the affluence of his classmates and the struggles of his neighbors—Wes began to act out, succumbing to bad grades, suspensions, and delinquencies. Desperate to reverse his behavior, his mother sent him to military school in Pennsylvania. After trying to escape five times, Wes finally decided to stop railing against the system and become accountable for his actions. By graduation six years later, Moore was company commander overseeing 125 cadets.

Seeking to help other young people to redirect their lives, Wes is committed to being a positive influence and helping kids find the support they need to enact change. Pointing out that a high school student drops out every nine seconds, Wes says that public servants—the teachers, mentors and volunteers who work with our youth—are as imperative to our national standing and survival as are our armed forces. “Public service does not have to be an occupation,” he says, “but it must be a way of life.”

Moore lives with his wife Dawn in New Jersey.

-wwtheotherwesmoore.com/about-the-author
# FAMILY and FRIENDS of “AUTHOR” WES MOORE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Wes Moore</strong></th>
<th>Author and narrator. He chronicles his life as well as that of the “other” Wes Moore, and discusses how the decisions they each made took them down different paths.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Joy</strong></td>
<td>Wes Moore’s mother. She moved her family from Baltimore to her parents’ home in the Bronx and worked multiple jobs to ensure her family had better opportunities.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Nikki</strong></td>
<td>Wes’s older half-sister.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shani</strong></td>
<td>Wes’s younger sister.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Westley Moore</strong></td>
<td>Wes’s father. He was a Baltimore-area newscaster and journalist before dying of acute epiglottis when young Wes was three years old.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Bill</strong></td>
<td>Joy’s first husband and Nikki’s father. When his recreational drug and alcohol abuse became an addiction, he became physically abusive, so Joy took Nikki and left him.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Rev. James Thomas</strong></td>
<td>Wes’s grandfather. He immigrated to the United States from Jamaica to get an education before joining the ministry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Winell Thomas</strong></td>
<td>Wes’s grandmother. She emigrated with her family from Cuba to Jamaica, where she met James. They got married, and when James finished his education, he sent for his wife and children to join him in the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Justin</strong></td>
<td>Wes’s closest friend during childhood. He was one of the only other black students at the private school they attended. Despite personal tragedies, such as the deaths of his parents and his own battles with cancer, he became successful and remains one of Wes’s friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shea</strong></td>
<td>One of Wes’s neighborhood friends that gets him into trouble for “tagging”. He eventually gets further into the drug game and goes to prison.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Aunt BB</strong></td>
<td>Wes’s godmother and longtime friend of his grandparents. She lived with them in their house in the Bronx at one time and was fiercely protective of them.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sergeant Austin</strong></td>
<td>Wes’s squad leader when he first arrives at Valley Forge. He sets Wes up to believe he gets to go home, but the plan is just to take him to the Colonel. This plan ultimately leads Wes to stay in school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Col. Batt</strong></td>
<td>Head of Valley Forge when Wes attended. He let Wes call home after his botched escape, which started Wes down the path of reform.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Uncle Howard</strong></td>
<td>Wes’s uncle and one of his mentors. He often acted as the voice of reason for Wes.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dalio</strong></td>
<td>Wes’s fellow platoon sergeant at Valley Forge. He was with Wes the night they were harassed by strangers in town.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mayor Schmoke</strong></td>
<td>Mayor of Baltimore, and fellow Rhodes Scholar, for whom Wes interned. He encouraged Wes to apply for the Rhodes scholarship.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Capt. Ty Hill</strong></td>
<td>Leader of F Company, the most prestigious unit at Valley Forge, when Wes attended. Wes’s mother asked Capt. Hill to look out for Wes, and he ultimately became one of Wes’s mentors and best friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mama, Zinzi, &amp; Viwe</strong></td>
<td>Members of the Xhosa tribe, and Wes’s “host family” when he studied abroad in South Africa. He learned a lot about ubuntu, the Xhosa word for humanity, and that way of life.</td>
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**FAMILY and FRIENDS of “THE OTHER” WES MOORE**

**Wes Moore**
The “other” Wes Moore. His childhood is chronicled along with the author Wes Moore to highlight how decision-making played a role in the paths they chose, and the situations they find themselves in today. He is currently in prison, serving a life sentence without parole for the murder of a policeman during a robbery.

**Mary Moore**
Wes’s mother. She tried to pursue an education in order to better her family, but was unable to continue school due to financial constraints.

**Tony**
Wes’s older brother. He got involved in the drug game earlier and tried to do everything he could to keep Wes out of it. He was one of the four people also at the robbery that day. He ultimately died in prison of kidney failure.

**Kenneth**
Mary’s father. After her mother Alma’s death, his alcoholism worsened, and Alma’s parents took over raising his children.

**Alma**
Mary’s mother. She died after a rejected kidney transplant. At the time, Mary was pregnant with Tony.

**Bernard**
Wes’s father. He was an alcoholic who was not involved in Wes’s childhood.

**Woody**
Wes’s closest neighborhood friend. They played football together, and often got into trouble together. He ultimately became one of Wes’s only friends to graduate high school.

**Mamie**
Wes’s paternal grandmother. She often watched him when Mary wanted to go out.

**Red**
Wes’s godbrother. They rode the bus together when attending school in Baltimore County.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alicia</td>
<td>The mother of Wes’s first and second children. She was pregnant within two months of the day she met Wes on the school bus. She currently only has custody of one of her children with Wes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ray</td>
<td>The man Wes shot in retaliation for having been beaten up for sleeping with Ray’s girlfriend. Wes served six months in jail for shooting Ray.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aunt Nicey</td>
<td>Wes’s aunt. She allowed Wes to live with her when he got out of jail for shooting Ray. In order to live there, Wes had to either be in school or get a job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheryl</td>
<td>The mother of Wes’s third and fourth children. She battled drug addiction, and did not have custody of their children. She was paralyzed from a fall at age 24, and ultimately died from her injuries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levy</td>
<td>Wes’s friend. He introduced Wes to Job Corps, and was his roommate during their time in the program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sgt. Bruce Prothero</td>
<td>Veteran of the Baltimore Police Department and part-time security guard at the jewelry store robbed by Wes, Tony, and two others. He was shot and killed during the robbery, and left behind a wife and five children.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THEMES/TOPICS*

The themes and topics listed below are found throughout *The Other Wes Moore*. These ideas can be used to spark discussion not only about how they relate to the text, but also about how the themes and topics relate to students’ lives and our current society. We recommend that you use articles, print and popular media, presenters, etc. to supplement your discussion.

Abuse
Activism
Addiction
Adversity
Ambition
Assimilation
Assumptions
Awareness
Balance
Choices
Community
Compromise
Confrontation
Consequences
Controversy
Critical Thinking
Cultural Pressure & Influence
Decision-making
Defeat
Determination
Drug & Alcohol Abuse
Economic Injustice
Education
Environment
Experiences
Expectations
Friendships
Failure
Fate
Fear
Financial Burdens
First Generation College Students
Generational Differences
Goal Setting
Habits
Helplessness
Hope
Influences
Isolation
Knowledge

Loss
Maturity
Mentoring
Motivation
Music
Opportunity
Ordinary to Extraordinary
Overcoming Obstacles
Parental/Familial Pressure & Influence
Passion
Peer Pressure & Influence
Perseverance
Perspective
Personality Differences
Pop Culture
Poverty
Preparation
Privilege
Purpose
Race
Reactions
Relationships
Resiliency
Resources
Respect
Responsibility
Risk-taking
Sacrifice
Self-confidence
Self-sufficiency
Single Parenthood
Societal Pressure & Influence
Stereotypes
Stress
Success
Support
Survival
Tradition
Utilizing Resources & Information
Wisdom

*If you are interested in incorporating an excerpt from the text and would like assistance, please contact Brittany Blake at brblak02@louisville.edu or 852-3125.

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CHAPTER SUMMARIES

Part I: Fathers and Angels
Chapter 1: Is Daddy Coming with Us? (1982)

“Author” Wes
While playing a game of chase with his sister Nikki, three-year-old Wes caught her for the first time. For lack of a better idea of what to do next, he punched her. His mother Joy’s angry and sudden reaction to him punching his sister was confusing to him. While Wes hid in his room, he heard his father, Westley, trying to calm his mother down. Westley reminded Joy that Wes did not know hitting a woman was wrong or why Joy felt so strongly about it. Years later, Wes would finally understand why his mother reacted in that way.

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Joy emigrated to the U.S. from Jamaica with her family when she was very young and had to learn how to fit into American society: “she studies the other kids at school like an anthropologist, trying desperately to fit in” (pg. 8). The things she experienced as she assimilated into a new country and culture created in her a passion for justice. She joined an activist group while attending American University in Washington, D.C., where she met her first husband, Bill. Though their relationship started off well, it began to go downhill when Bill’s recreational drug and alcohol use became an addiction. Even though they had a child together (Wes’s older sister Nikki), Joy left Bill after a particularly violent encounter ended with her battered, but determined. Joy met her second husband, Westley, when she was hired as a writing assistant for his radio show. They married, and had two children together, Wes (the author) and Shani.

****************
Wes’s father coming to speak to him that day about punching his sister is one of the two memories he has of his father; the other is from the day his father died. His father had not been feeling well all day, and eventually had to be taken to the hospital. The doctors however, did not know what to do for his symptoms and sent him home. Later that evening, he collapsed and ultimately, passed away from acute epiglottis. Westley’s death affected the entire family, and was a confusing time for young Wes.

The “Other” Wes
Wes had never met his father. His mother, Mary, was his sole provider. During this time Mary was enrolled at Johns Hopkins University, but after only earning 16 credits, the budget for Pell Grants was cut and Mary lost the funding to continue her education. Her job as a secretary was just enough to take care of her family and home, but she was going to have to withdraw from college. Though Wes was still young, he knew something had upset his mother, and made her tell him what had happened and why she was so upset. Mary explained the situation and also how important it had been to her parents that she attends college.

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When Mary got pregnant at sixteen with her first son (Wes’s older half brother, Tony), her mother Alma made her promise she would still go to school. However, Alma’s kidneys were failing and Mary’s father Kenneth was an alcoholic, so she did not always have the support she needed. Alma had an unsuccessful kidney transplant and passed away. Kenneth did not take her death well, so Alma’s parents moved in to help raise Mary and her seven siblings.

After Mary met Wes’s father, Bernard, she was pregnant within a few months with Wes. Unfortunately, Bernard was similar to Tony’s father and was an alcoholic without a steady job. Bernard only tried to be involved in Wes’s life one time, but he was extremely drunk so Mary did not allow it.

At the time the story opens, Wes and Mary lived in a section of Baltimore that had never fully recovered from the civil rights riots of the 1960s. Tony lived primarily with his grandparents or with his father. Despite no longer being able to attend college, Mary wanted desperately to find a way to get her family away from those dangerous streets.

On the night Mary received the bad news about her Pell Grant, she decided to take Wes to his Grandmother Mamie’s house so she could go relax with some friends. When they arrived, Wes ran inside and encountered a man he had never seen before. The man drunkenly sitting on his mother’s couch was Wes’s father. Mary introduced them for the first time.

Themes for Exploration and Interpretation

Abuse                        Education
Activism                     First Generation College Students
Addiction                    Loss
Assimilation                 Resiliency
Decision-making             Resources
Economic Injustice           Single Parenthood

Thinking Critically

1) “Learning the details of his story helped me understand my own life and choices, and I like to think that my story helped him understand his own a little more.”
   – Introduction, pg. xiii

   a. How does learning about someone else’s story help us learn more about ourselves?

2) “I don’t want readers to ever forget the high stakes of these stories—and of all of our stories: that life and death, freedom and bondage, hang in the balance of every action we take…this book will use our two lives as a way of thinking about choices and accountability, not just for each of us as individuals but for all of us
as a society…our destinies can be determined by a single stumble down the wrong path, or a tentative step down the right one.” – Introduction, pg. xiv

a. Decisions, big and small, have an impact on our lives. Talk about a decision you had to make that later, surprisingly, had a large impact.

3) Joy’s first husband physically and verbally abused her, which is why she reacted so harshly when a young Wes hit his sister. – pgs. 5-11

a. Do you believe abuse is inherited (nature), learned (nurture), or both?

4) (Remembering how his father explained to him the reasons why hitting his sister was wrong) “That is one of only two memories I have of my father. The other was when I watched him die.” – pg. 11

a. What is a childhood memory that is seared into your brain?
b. What effect has that experience had on you?

5) Wes’s father dies when Wes is very young. – pgs. 11-16

a. How do you think this event helped to shape Wes as he developed into a man?
b. Reflect on your own experiences. What significant people, events, places, ideas, etc. have shaped your development, and how?

Thought Provoking Quotes

“This is the story of two boys living in Baltimore with similar histories and an identical name: Wes Moore. One of us is free and has experienced things that he never even knew to dream about as a kid. The other will spend every day until his death behind bars for an armed robbery that left a police officer and father of five dead. The chilling truth is that his story could have been mine. The tragedy is that my story could have been his. Our stories are obviously specific to our two lives, but I hope they will illuminate the crucial inflection points in every life, the sudden moments of decision where our paths diverge and our fates are sealed. It’s unsettling to know how little separates each of us from another life altogether.” – Introduction

(About Joy) “…she discovered that what she had foolishly thought of as his typical low-level recreational drug use was really something much worse. In a time of drug experimentation and excess, Bill was starting to look like a casualty.” – pg. 9
Topics to Analyze

“Your father wasn’t there because he couldn’t be, my father wasn’t there because he chose not to be. We’re going to mourn their absence in different ways.” – pg. 3

- **EXPLORE** the reasons behind the decision of one father to leave and the event of one father dying and how they would affect you differently.

“It always amazed me how I could love so deeply, so intensely, someone I barely knew. I was taught to remember, but never question. Wes was taught to forget, and never ask why.” – pg. 4

- **EXPLORE** the impact people can have on your life even if they are only in it for a short time.

“When my mom first landed in the Bronx, she was just a small child, but she was a survivor and learned quickly. She studied the other kids at school like an anthropologist, trying desperately to fit in.” – pg. 8

- **EXPLORE** trying to find where you fit in a new environment, which could be compared to the first year of college.

“My father had entered the hospital seeking help. But his face was unshaven, his clothes disheveled, his name unfamiliar, his address not in an affluent area. The hospital looked at him askance, insulted him with ridiculous questions, and basically told him to fend for himself. Now, my mother had to plan his funeral.” – pg. 15

- **EXPLORE** stereotyping, making assumptions, and point of view, and how they can negatively impact a situation.

“The letter Mary was hiding explained that the federal budget for Basic Educational Opportunity Grants – or Pell Grants- was being slashed, and her grant was being terminated...Mary realized the letter effectively closed the door on her college aspirations. She had already completed sixteen hours of college credits and would get no closer toward graduation.” – pg. 17

- **EXPLORE** the rising costs of education in America, and consider how students (particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds) are adversely affected by the lack of resources in our struggling economy.
**Chapter 2: In Search of Home (1984)**

*The “Other” Wes*

Wes’s brother Tony lived with his father in the Murphy Homes Projects, a very dangerous, dirty, and drug-infested area. Though Tony was only six years older than Wes, he was very protective of his younger brother. “[Wes] loved his brother, but had learned to ignore his occasional ‘do as I say, not as I do’ tirades. Tony, by contrast, was desperately trying to give his little brother information he thought he needed, the kind of information that Tony never got,” (pg. 27). Tony had already developed a fierce reputation, and he hoped Wes would make better choices than he had.

Wes had a good friend named Woody, and they both played football for the Northwood Rams. Wes said that wearing that jersey made him feel proud and like he belonged. Being athletic and succeeding in football soon became important to him, and unfortunately his performance in school declined as a result. Wes and Woody played football often in their neighborhood, and it was not uncommon to get a pickup game going.

One day, Wes played defense a little too close for one boy’s liking. An argument started, and the boy punched Wes in the face. Everyone was stunned. Wes ran home, and Woody ran after him to make sure he was okay. Woody found Wes in his kitchen with a knife. Despite Tony’s warnings to keep out of trouble, he had also taught Wes to never let someone get away with hurting your pride: “’rule number one: If someone disrespects you, you send a message so fierce that they won’t have the chance to do it again.’” (pg. 33). Wes was angry and wanted to send the boy a message.

Woody tried to stop him, but Wes ran outside to confront the boy, not even noticing that police officers had shown up. Wes ran at the boy, but was tackled by one of the officers. Wes and Woody were both arrested and taken to jail. Knowing he could not call his mother, Wes called Tony. Tony’s father agreed to pick him up. Wes was back home before his mother got there; she didn’t find out for years that he had been arrested that day.

*“Author” Wes*

Joy (Wes’s mother) was not coping with the death of her husband well. Her parents offered for Joy and her children to move in with them in their house in the Bronx whenever she wanted. Joy decided to take them up on their offer, and three weeks later, they were leaving Maryland.

Joy grew up in the Bronx, and had fond memories of that time. She remembered it as a safe, family-oriented community, and was excited to move her family away from Baltimore. However, as they got closer to their new home, it was evident things had changed in the Bronx. Drugs and violence had crept in, and it was no longer the tight-knit community it had once been.

***************

Joy’s father, Josiah, was a minister’s son, and her mother Winell was a member of the congregation of his church in Jamaica. They fell in love, and began to plan a life together. Josiah wished to follow in his father’s footsteps, but knew he must get an education first. He came to America to attend Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. After
completing his education, he sent for his wife and children, and they made their home in
the Bronx.

After settling into his grandparent’s home, Wes quickly realized their rules were
even stricter than his mother’s. He decided to seek out ways to get out of the house
and make some friends. Wes found some guys playing basketball at a court with no
nets. He quickly realized they were older and better than him, and that they played
hard. He decided to stick it out though, and ended up making some new friends. “The
basketball court is a strange patch of neutral ground, a meeting place for every element
of a neighborhood’s cohort of young men...We were all enclosed by the same fence,
bumping into one another, fighting, celebrating. Showing one another our best and
worst, revealing ourselves—even our cruelty and crimes—as if that fence had created a
circle of trust. A brotherhood,” (pg. 45). Wes’s first experience at the court would lead
to many more.

Themes for Exploration and Interpretation

Community \hspace{1cm} Loss
Confrontation \hspace{1cm} Parental/Familial Pressure & Influence
Consequences \hspace{1cm} Resiliency
Cultural Pressure & Influence \hspace{1cm} Resources
Decision-making \hspace{1cm} Respect
Economic Injustice \hspace{1cm} Responsibility
Fear \hspace{1cm} Single Parenthood
Hope \hspace{1cm} Support

Thinking Critically

1) (The other Wes Moore) “He loved his brother, but had learned to ignore his
occasional ‘do as I say, not as I do’ tirades. Tony, by contrast, was desperately
trying to give his little brother information he thought he needed, the kind of
information that Tony never got.” – pg. 27

\hspace{1cm} a. What’s one thing you would tell a high school student just starting the
college search process?

2) “But no matter how tough he was, or how many corners he controlled, what
Tony really wanted was to go back in time, to before he’d gotten himself so deep
in the game, and do it all over. He wanted to be like Wes...Like a soldier after
years of combat, Tony hated the war and wanted Wes to do whatever he could to
avoid it. He was willing to risk seeming like a hypocrite.” – pg. 28

\hspace{1cm} a. What is one thing you would change if you could have a “do-over”?
3) “...my grandparents figured if these rules had helped their children successfully navigate the world, they would work on their grandkids too.” – pg. 42
   a. *What is one rule your parents/guardians have that despite being annoying, is one you will probably enforce with your children one day?*

**Thought Provoking Quotes**

“The basketball court is a strange patch of neutral ground, a meeting place for every element of a neighborhood’s cohort of young men...We were all enclosed by the same fence, bumping into one another, fighting, celebrating. Showing one another our best and worst, revealing ourselves—even our cruelty and crimes—as if that fence had created a circle of trust. A brotherhood.” – pg. 45

**Topics to Explore**

“Woody came from a working-class, two-parent household...Wes had never really seen a father around. Single-parent households were the norm in his world. At best, kids would have a set-up like his brother Tony’s, whereby they would get to see their fathers regularly and even stay with them a lot. But a family where the father lived with the mother, happily? This was new to Wes, and he liked it.” – pg. 30

- **EXPLORE** varying family dynamics and the effects (both positive and negative) they can have on a child’s development.
Chapter 3: Foreign Ground (1987)

“Author” Wes

Seeing how poor the public school system had become, Joy decided to send her children to private school. The cost was difficult to manage, but she worked multiple jobs and relied on her parents to watch the children before and after school in order to pay for schooling. Wes became friends with Justin, bonding because they lived close to each other, but also because they were two of the only black kids at their school.

Wes was less than pleased by what attending the school was doing to his reputation, though. His neighborhood friends teased him for attending a “white” school. His school friends did not understand why their conversations about summer homes and video game systems were alienating to Wes. One day, in an effort to bring Wes’s worlds together, his uncle suggested he invite his friends from school to play baseball with his neighborhood friends. The game ended after only a few innings when arguments between the two groups turned into fist fights.

“I was becoming too ‘rich’ for the kids from the neighborhood and too ‘poor’ for the kids at school. I had forgotten how to act naturally, thinking way too much in each situation and getting tangled in the contradictions between my two worlds,” (pg. 54). Wes was now confused about how to act in almost every situation he found himself in. His grades began to slip, and he was not confident in his abilities. His mother began to threaten that she would send him to military school. He shared this with his friend Justin, who, despite having all the same circumstances as Wes, was one of the top performing students in their grade. Justin warned him to get it together, because he thought Joy was serious. Wes didn’t believe his mother would ever send him away to military school.

The “Other” Wes

Mary and Wes were now living in Baltimore County, in an attempt to distance themselves from the streets of Baltimore City. Tony was already deep in the drug game, with people working for him. He had recently been shot, right around the same time that Wes failed sixth grade and had to repeat it. These events solidified Mary’s decision to move.

Although Wes knew what Tony did to make money was wrong, he was also envious of the nice clothes and things he was able to buy with his money. One day, he saw a kid “wearing a headset right out of the Janet Jackson ‘Control’ video” (pg. 57). When Wes asked how he could get one of those, the kid explained that all Wes had to do was wear one and speak into it whenever he saw the police come by, and he would get paid for it. Wes knew this was part of the drug game Tony warned him to stay away from, but the money sold Wes.

Wes had tried marijuana only once. He stole his mother’s stash on a day he skipped school, and shared it with Woody and some friends. It made Wes feel terrible, and all he wanted was for the effects to wear off. His mother thought that would be punishment enough, but it was not enough to keep Wes from accepting the job as a lookout. “…he realized how time seemed to stop when he was high, how the drug-smoking it, feeling its effects, recovering from it- made him forget everything else. And
he understood, faintly, how addictive that feeling could be, and how easy it would be to make some money off selling that feeling to people who needed it,” (pg. 62).

Themes for Exploration and Interpretation

Addiction
Community
Compromise
Consequences
Decision-making
Drug & Alcohol Abuse
Economic Injustice

Education
Environment
Fear
Peer Pressure & Influence
Resources
Risk-taking
Survival

Thinking Critically

1) “I was becoming too ‘rich’ for the kids from the neighborhood and too ‘poor’ for the kids at school. I had forgotten how to act naturally, thinking way too much in each situation and getting tangled in the contradictions between my two worlds.” – pg. 54

   a. Reflect on your own experiences. Have you ever felt caught between two worlds?
   b. How did you reconcile your two worlds?

Thought Provoking Quotes

(As Wes is waiting for the ambulance to arrive to assist his father) “At this point my memories get less distinct. It was like standing in a field when a powerful gust of wind suddenly blows: everything around you vanishes, all you hear is the wind filling your ears, all you feel is the wind on your skin. Your eyes tear, and sight blurs. Your mind all but empties.” – pg. 14

(Referring to the drug game) “This game didn’t require studying or exams. It didn’t require a degree or vocational skills. All he needed was ambition. And guts. And, as Wes was soon to understand, and ability to live with constant fear.” – pg. 58

“As he lay in bed, he realized how time seemed to stop when he was high, how the drug- smoking it, feeling its effects, recovering from it- made him forget everything else. And he understood, faintly, how addictive that feeling could be, and how easy it would be to make some money off selling that feeling to people who needed it.” – pg. 62
Topics to Explore

“Just as the street corners of the Bronx had changed, so had the public schools. Things were falling apart, and the halls of school were no exception or refuge from the chaos outside.” – pg. 47

- EXPLORE the fall of education in America, particularly in the inner-city.

“We walked through a fog of food smells blowing in from around the world—beef patties and curry goat from the Jamaican spot, deep-fried dumplings and chicken wings from the Chinese take-out joint, cuchifritos from the Puerto Rican lunch counter. Up and down the street were entrepreneurial immigrants in colorful clothes—embroidered guayaberas and flowing kente and spray-painted T-shirts—hustling everything from mix tapes to T-shirts to incense from crowded sidewalk tables. The air rang with English and Spanish in every imaginable accent, spoken by parents barking orders to their children or young lovers playfully flirting with each other. By now, all of this felt like home.” – pg. 48

- EXPLORE the “melting pot” of America; the effects various cultures have on the formation of community.

“I tried to hide the fact that my family was so much poorer than everyone else’s at school. Every week I sat down to create a schedule for my clothes. I had three ‘good’ shirts and three ‘good’ pairs of pants. I would rotate their order, mixing and matching so that each day I had on a fresh combination.” – pg. 52

- EXPLORE importance placed on appearance and material items, and the effect it can have on developing children’s self-esteem.

“Later in life I learned that the way many governors projected the number of beds they’d need for prison facilities was by examining the reading scores of third graders. Elected officials deduced that a strong percentage of kids reading below their grade level by third grade would be needing a secure place to stay when they got older. Considering my performance in the classroom thus far, I was well on my way to needing state-sponsored accommodations.” – pg. 54

- EXPLORE long-term effects education (or lack thereof) can have on your life; relationship between two seemingly unrelated environments (school and prison).
Part II: Choices and Second Chances
Chapter 4: Marking Territory (1990)

The “Other” Wes

Wes had begun selling drugs, which was making him plenty of money. He explained away the cash flow and expensive purchases by telling his mother he had become a successful DJ in the neighborhood. Mary believed him, but Tony didn’t. Tony came by the house one day and noticed Wes’s room had changed a lot since he had last been there. The tower of brand new shoe boxes convinced Tony that Wes had gotten into the drug game.

Tony confronted Wes about it, and the boys ended up fighting on the front lawn. Mary broke it up, and Tony decided to give up trying to tell Wes to stay away from the drug game. “Wes was completely taken aback by his brother’s anger. Tony had tried to keep Wes in school and away from drugs for as long as Wes could remember. But Tony was still deep in the game himself. Wes didn’t think Tony was a hypocrite exactly—he knew why his brother felt obliged to warn him off. But it was clear that Tony himself didn’t have any better ideas or he would’ve made those moves himself,” (pg. 71). Tony’s accusations persuaded Mary to investigate further. One day, she goes in Wes’s room and discovers some shoe boxes filled with drugs. She finally realizes Wes has been lying to her about his source of income. She flushes the drugs down the toilet.

When Wes arrived home and realized what his mother had done, he was very angry. He left his mother’s and headed to his older girlfriend’s house. “Wes complained to her about his mother’s abuse of his privacy. His girlfriend sympathized. Before she realized what she was doing, she’s agreed to make her home his new headquarters.” (pg. 73)

“Author” Wes

Wes has been struggling in school, and Joy has started to believe what his teachers are saying, that Wes must have a learning disability because he is unable to retain information. However, as she listens Wes rap the lyrics to a song he just heard a few days ago, she realizes he is just not working hard enough. What Joy didn’t know was that Wes rarely attended class. When his grandmother dropped him and Shani off for school, Wes typically attended only some of his classes, if any at all. Shani never told on Wes. At the time, Nikki was also struggling with school. She attended three different high schools in four years. Shani was the “prodigy” of the family, with reading scores higher than her older siblings.

Wes was fiercely protective of his family, particularly of Shani. Once when she was punched in the face, Wes threatened the person who did it as well as her older brother. Shani was never bothered by them again. Wes was not the only one who was protective of the family. At the time, eight people lived in their house in the Bronx, including his “Aunt BB,” a long-time friend of his grandparents. Aunt BB was Wes’s godmother, and felt very strongly about anyone hurting her godchildren.

Wes’s fierce attitude was just one of the things he learned from his friends on the streets of the Bronx. He learned about hip-hop music and the way it reconciled his two worlds (the streets he lived on and the private school he attended), as well as the “facts
of life” and the realities of gang violence. He also learned how to tag (spray paint your nickname or symbol on public property).

One day, Wes met up with his friend Shea, who was a drug runner. Shea was working on a corner, so Wes sat down to hang out with him. Shea suggested they tag the wall they were sitting by, and Wes agreed. Wes sprayed his tag, a “KK” with a circle around it (which stood for Kid Kupid). Almost immediately, a police car pulls up and catches the boys as they try to run away. They are put in handcuffs and thrown in the back of the police car. Wes is very upset, and realizes this is not the life for him. He does not want to disappoint his mother, and is angry at the defiant way Shea is treating the policemen. Wes, on being arrested: “I became aware of how I had put myself in this unimaginably dire situation—this man now had control of my body; even my own hands had become useless to me. More than that, he had control of my destiny—or at least my immediate fate. And I couldn’t deny that it was my own stupid fault. I didn’t have the energy for romantic rebellion—the possibility of losing all control of my life was like a depthless black chasm that had suddenly opened up in front of me,” (pg. 83). When the policemen decide to let them go, Wes is thankful and swears to himself that he will never be in a situation like that again. However, just a week later, Wes is out tagging again.

Themes for Exploration and Interpretation

- Confrontation
- Consequences
- Decision-making
- Defeat
- Education
- Expectations
- Music
- Parental/Familial Pressure & Influence
- Peer Pressure & Influence
- Risk-taking
- Self-sufficiency
- Societal Pressure & Influence
- Survival

Thinking Critically

1) “Wes knew he was disappointing his brother, which hurt him more than the beating he’d just taken. Wes was so confused. He loved and respected his brother. Tony was the closest thing Wes had to a role model. But the more he tried to be like his brother, the more his brother rejected him. The more he copied him, the more Tony pushed back. Wes wanted to be just like Tony. Tony wanted Wes to be nothing like him.” – pg. 72

   a. Why do parents, family members, teachers, etc. set expectations for us?
   b. How is it beneficial to “learn from other people’s mistakes”?

2) About Wes selling drugs: “Who is to blame for this? Tony, the neighborhood, the school system, Wes’s friends? She put them all on trial in her mind. She was furious at Wes for what he’s done and knew that this probably would not be the end of it.” – pg. 75
a. When trying to figure out who to blame for Wes getting into the drug game, Mary noticeably does not think to include herself. Do you think Mary should take some of the responsibility?
b. Who or what do you believe is to blame for Wes getting into the drug game?

3) About Mrs. Downs, “author” Wes’s homeroom teacher: “One day she flatly told me that it didn’t matter to her if I showed up because the class ran smoother when I wasn’t there. From that moment, I understood Mrs. Downs and I had an unspoken agreement, a ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ pact that worked like a charm for both of us.” – pg. 77

a. How might Wes’s grades, behavior, etc. have been different if he would have had teachers that supported him?
b. Think about this situation from Mrs. Downs’ perspective. How do you see her side of the situation?
c. What might you have done if you were Wes’s teacher?

4) On “author” Wes being arrested: “The cops gave us a gift that day, and I swore I would never get caught in a situation like that again. A week later, Kid Kupid was on the loose again, adding my tag to another graffiti-filled Bronx wall.” – pg. 84

a. Why do we sometimes need multiples instances to learn a lesson?
b. Reflect on your own experiences. Have you ever needed multiple instances before you learned your lesson?

Thought Provoking Quotes

“I guess sometimes it’s hard to distinguish between second chances and last chances.”
– Ch. 4, Introduction

“Tony was exhausted. Tired from the beating he just gave Wes. Tired from repeating himself. ‘If you won’t listen, that’s on you. You have potential to do so much more, go so much further. You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink right?’…That was the last time Tony ever tried to talk to Wes about the drug game.” – pgs. 71-72

“I became aware of how I had put myself in this unimaginably dire situation (being arrested)—this man now had control of my body; even my own hands had become useless to me. More than that, he had control of my destiny—or at least my immediate fate. And I couldn’t deny that it was my own stupid fault. I didn’t have the energy for romantic rebellion—the possibility of losing all control of my life was like a depthless black chasm that had suddenly opened up in front of me.” – pg. 83
Topics to Explore

“Wes was completely taken aback by his brother’s anger. Tony had tried to keep Wes in school and away from drugs for as long as Wes could remember. But Tony was still deep in the game himself. Wes didn’t think Tony was a hypocrite exactly—he knew why his brother felt obliged to warn him off. But it was clear that Tony himself didn’t have any better ideas or he would’ve made those moves himself.” – pg. 71

- **EXPLORE** the cycle experienced by many in the inner city: they don’t want to enter the drug game but see no other way to support themselves and their family.

“Hip-hop had begun to play a special role in my life. It wasn’t just music and lyrics. It was a validator. In my struggle to reconcile my two worlds, it was an essential asset…I found in hip-hop the sound of my generation talking to itself, working through the fears and anxieties and inchoate dreams—of wealth or power or revolution or success—we all shared. It broadcast an exaggerated version of our complicated interior lives to the world, made us feel less alone in the madness of the era, less marginal.” – pg. 76

- **EXPLORE** whether there are any genres of music that explain today’s society in this way.

“The relationship between the police and the people they served and protected changed significantly during the 1980s. For almost as long as black folks have been in this country, they’ve had a complicated relationship with law enforcement—and vice versa. But the situation in the eighties felt like a new low. Drugs had brought fear to both sides of the equation. You could see it in the people in the neighborhood, intimidated by the drug dealers and gangs, harassed by the petty crimes of the crack heads, and frightened by the sometimes arbitrary and aggressive behavior of the cops themselves. On the other end of the relationship, the job of policemen, almost overnight, had gotten significantly tougher. The tide of drugs was matched by a tide of guns. The high-stakes crack trade brought a new level of competition and organization to the streets.” – pg. 81

- **EXPLORE** this issue from both sides (citizen and officer), making sure to hit on important factors like race, authority, societal influence, etc.
Chapter 5: Lost (1991)

“Author” Wes

Joy had just gotten off the phone with Wes’s school. The dean had let her know they were putting him on academic and disciplinary probation for his bad grades, class absences, and an incident with a smoke bomb. She was already incredibly upset with Wes when Shani starts screaming that Wes punched her in the lip.

Though splitting his sister’s lip had been an accident, Wes knew his mother would not see it that way. He waited for her to start screaming at him, and was surprised when she slapped him across the face instead. When Wes did not react, she slapped him again. Wes still remained quiet and motionless. Joy left the room, and unbeknownst to Wes, made the decision to send him to military school.

Wes arrived at military school with a defiant attitude, and the appearance that he was ready to take whatever came at him. But inside, he felt confused and betrayed by his mother. He ran away four times in the first four days of being there. Wes had heard there was a train station nearby, but could not figure out how to get there. One day, his squad leader, Sergeant Austin came to him and gave him a map. Austin told him it was a map to the train station, because if Wes didn’t want to be there, they didn’t want him there.

That very night, Wes set out to follow the map Austin had given him. Wes quickly realized the map was taking him in directions he had never been, and that he was now lost. Just as he broke down, he heard laughter and watched as Sergeant Austin and the rest of his squad came out of the trees. Wes had been tricked. He was taken to the Colonel’s office. Though new students (or “plebes”) were normally not allowed to call home for at least one month, Colonel Batt realized if he didn’t make an exception, Wes would not make it.

Wes called his mother and begged to come home, but she reminded him that too much had been sacrificed to get him there. What Wes didn’t know was that his mother had written every friend and family member she had to ask for money, and his grandparents had given up all of their retirement money, in order to send him to school. The next day, Wes noticed Colonel Batt speaking to one of the men that had helped bring Wes back to school. Colonel Batt came over and informed him that the man wanted to speak with Wes. “In spite of myself, I was impressed. I had never seen anything like that before. I had never seen a man, a peer, demand that much respect from his people. I had seen Shea demand respect in the neighborhood, but this was different. This was real respect, the kind you can’t beat out of people. That’s when I started to understand that I was in a different environment…It was a different psychological environment, where my normal expectations were inverted, where leadership was honored and class clowns ostracized,” (pg. 96). Unbeknownst to Wes, his mother had requested the man, Captain Ty Hill, look out for him and be his mentor.

The “Other” Wes

Wes attended high school in West Baltimore, out in the county. It was a long bus ride out to the school, and Wes and his godbrother Red typically spent the ride flirting with girls or coming up with a plan to flirt with girls once they got to school. One day, Wes met Alicia on the bus. They began hanging out a lot, and within two months, Alicia
told Wes she was pregnant. Wes hoped Alicia was wrong, but the physical evidence soon became undeniable. “In Baltimore in 1991, 11.7 percent of girls between the ages of fifteen and nineteen had given birth. More than one out of ten. [Wes] also didn’t feel burdened by the thought that early parenthood would wreck his future plans—because he didn’t really have any future plans...But in some unspoken way, he did sense that he was crossing a point of no return, that things were about to get complicated in a way he was unequipped to handle,” (pg. 100).

Wes had to tell someone, so he decided to call Tony. Tony started laughing at Wes when he realized that with their mother having given birth a year earlier, giving them a little brother, and his girlfriend having recently given birth, giving Wes a nephew, Wes was now going to have a brother, nephew, and son all about the same age. Though Wes didn’t want to tell his mother right away, Tony let it slip at their brother’s 1st birthday party. Mary was initially quiet, but ultimately continued on with the party, unsurprised by this development.

Alicia’s pregnancy did not stop Wes from meeting other girls. He soon had regular meetings with a girl who did not live in his neighborhood, but whose cousin did, so she was around often. One night, the girl realized how late it was and demanded Wes walk her to the door so she could hurry home. Once outside, a man began yelling at her and it was clear that she had something going on with this person, too. Wes tried to stay out of it, but the man grabbed him and beat him up.

Wes got away and ran inside to grab his gun. By now, the commotion had caused a crowd, and one of Wes’s friends also ran out with his gun. Wes and his friend began to chase the man, who they learned was named Ray. Based on the direction Ray was running in, Wes realized he must be the “cousin” his girl had told him she had in the neighborhood. They began shooting at him as they ran, and eventually Ray was hit. Wes headed home and slammed the door in the crying girl’s face.

Mary demanded to know what was going on, but Wes refused to talk to her. She eventually called Tony, who immediately headed toward the house. Wes cleaned himself up and hid his gun, just in time for the police to come to his house. Wes was arrested and put in the police car as witnesses were questioned. Minutes after the police pulled away with Wes in the car, Tony arrived. Mary could only tell him that Wes was already gone.

Themes for Exploration and Interpretation

- Consequences
- Decision-making
- Determination
- Environment
- Financial Burdens
- Helplessness
- Maturity
- Mentoring
- Relationships
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Sacrifice
- Single Parenthood
- Support
Thinking Critically

1) “In spite of myself, I was impressed. I had never seen anything like that before. I had never seen a man, a peer, demand that much respect from his people. I had seen Shea demand respect in the neighborhood, but this was different. This was real respect, the kind you can’t beat out of people. That’s when I started to understand that I was in a different environment...It was a different psychological environment, where my normal expectations were inverted, where leadership was honored and class clowns ostracized.” – pg. 96

   a. Reflect on your own experiences. When have you felt truly respected?
   b. When have you truly respected someone else?

2) “Wes’s nonexistent relationship with his father probably contributed to his seeming indifference about becoming a father himself. All he knew was his mom. He had no idea what his role would be in this new situation—he wasn’t even sure he had a role.” – pg. 101

   a. How do we learn the right thing when we have never had a role model?

Thought Provoking Quotes

“She simply pulled back her right hand back and slapped me. The burn consumed the entire left side of my face. Not willing to show fear or weakness, I stood there looking back at her. I guess she was expecting tears or apologies. When neither came, she reached back and unloaded another slap to my face. She looked at me again, waiting for a reaction. By this time, I was five inches taller that she was, and my recently defined shoulders, biceps, and triceps made me look older than my age. Every reflex inside said to strike back, but I didn’t. How could I? She was my everything, the person I loved and respected most in my world. I had no idea what to do.” – pg. 88

Right after “other” Wes shot Ray: “Wes heard commotion downstairs and knew his time was just about up. He reached into the wooden drawer next to his bed and got a clean blue shirt with white stripes on it….Wes hurriedly smoothed the shirt down and put his hands in the air, not wanting the cops to think he was armed. He knew how that scenario would end.” – pg. 106

Topics to Explore

“Author” Wes: “My grandparents knew that I was at a crucial juncture in my life. These forks in the road can happen so fast for young boys; within months or even weeks, their journeys can take a decisive and possibly irrevocable turn. With no interventions—or the wrong intervention—they can be lost forever.” – pg. 95
EXPLORE the difference intervention can make in one's life, and how factors such as financial sacrifice and lack of support can determine whether interventions happen.

“How could Alicia have let herself get pregnant? He thought maybe it was a mistake. Maybe the result would change. Maybe she was just reading the tests wrong.” – pg. 99

EXPLORE the role maturity and responsibility play in engaging in a sexual relationship, and the opinion some men hold that contraception is a woman’s responsibility.

“In Baltimore in 1991, 11.7 percent of girls between the ages of fifteen and nineteen had given birth. More than one out of ten. [The “other” Wes Moore] also didn’t feel burdened by the thought that early parenthood would wreck his future plans—because he didn’t really have any future plans…But in some unspoken way, he did sense that he was crossing a point of no return, that things were about to get complicated in a way he was unequipped to handle.” – pg. 100

EXPLORE the level of emotional and mental development people of people when they engage in sexual activity before adulthood, and the effect that has on their decision-making.
Chapter 6: Hunted (1994)

*The “Other” Wes*

It’s graduation day at Northern High School. For many students and their families, it is the first graduation they have ever attended. Woody is the only one of Wes’s good friends to have completed the requirements to graduate. Wes, White Boy, and many others stopped going to school years earlier. Though graduation rates in Maryland were among some of the highest in the country, in Baltimore City only 38% of students who began high school actually earned their diploma.

Wes was in jail for six months after shooting Ray. Because no major organs were hit by the bullet, he was only charged with attempted murder, and due to his age, Wes was tried in juvenile court. Once he got out of jail, he went back to school, but that didn’t last long. Wes was way behind his classmates, and when Alicia gave birth to their child, he stopped going altogether. While Alicia took care of their baby, Wes lived with his Aunt Nicey. Nicey allowed him to stay under one condition: he had to either be in school or working, but could not stay without doing either. His lack of education and training, plus his criminal record, made finding a job very difficult. Though he was promising Nicey he was trying to look for a job, Wes was really operating a drug crew. He had a good crew, from the lookouts to the “muscle” (the members carrying weapons to protect the crew). On a good day, his crew could pull in over $4,000.

One day, “Wes stood on the corner in Dundee Village. He no longer lived there, but he had a little operation there—he would bring drugs into the county because he could sell them for a higher premium than in the city. He was surrounded by some guys from his crew…He had to get moving, but he lingered. He liked the feeling of holding down a corner with his boys. It was the one place he felt safe, or at least in his element,” (pg. 112). They were approached by an unfamiliar man. Despite several red flags that the man could be a cop (i.e. Wes didn’t recognize him, he used the wrong slang), Wes sold him cocaine. When Wes took the money, he noticed the man’s hands were smooth and clean (a sign he was not from the streets). Just a few minutes later, Wes was arrested for selling drugs to a police officer.

*“Author” Wes*

Wes had been at Valley Forge for three years. In that time, he had gone from being one of the most disruptive students to one of the most respected. He was a platoon sergeant, cadet master sergeant, and the youngest senior noncommissioned officer in the entire corps. He had finally learned how to respect himself and others.

Wes was not only committed to bettering himself personally, but academically and athletically. The financial burden military school had placed on his mother was lessened in his second year when he began receiving academic and athletic scholarships. He was the only sophomore starter on the basketball team, and colleges and universities had started taking notice of his skills. He spent his summers at basketball camps, speaking with coaches and other prospects. Despite his obvious talent, his family warned him to keep thinking about college. His uncle lectured him about always having a back-up plan, and how education could help him in that.
Though he wanted to keep dreaming of the NBA, the talk with his uncle and a letter from his old friend Justin brought things into perspective. Justin informed him that their friend Shea had been arrested on serious drug charges and was going to prison. Justin also shared that mother was dying, which made Wes question his environment. Even though he enjoyed military school now, it upset him that he was unable to be a support for his friends and family. He felt like military school was a “bubble” that had been his protection from the problems in the world he grew up in.

This idea was further solidified for Wes when he experienced racism and violence in the town by the school. As he and Dalio, a fellow platoon sergeant, walked to a local pizza parlor, they began to get harassed by a car full of drunken kids. Though Wes and Dalio tried to ignore and avoid them, the group shouted a racial slur at Wes and threw a bottle at him. The bottle hit him in the mouth, breaking one of his front teeth and cutting his gum. “My mouth was aching. I was beside myself with anger—and still confused. And embarrassed. Embarrassed to be called a nigger in front of my comrade. And embarrassed by my reaction. Because after being called a nigger and having my tooth broken, I’d decided to flee back to campus. Should I have stayed there in the middle of the street, waiting for the boys to come back, somehow gotten them out of their car, and tested them blow for blow? Part of me was aghast when I decided that the answer was no,” (pg. 121). His instincts were to fight back, but he had learned in the past few years that the odds were not in his favor. He chose to lead his fellow platoon sergeant back to school through a safer route, away from the street. Though Dalio did not know where they were, Wes did. “The irony of the situation forced me to smile, featuring my newly cracked tooth. Years earlier, I had run through these same woods with all of my might, looking for safety, trying to get away from campus. Tonight, I ran through the same woods looking for safety, but in the other direction,” pg. 122.

Themes for Exploration and Interpretation

- Ambition
- Awareness
- Community
- Consequences
- Critical Thinking
- Decision-making
- Education
- Environment
- Habits
- Mentoring
- Motivation
- Perspective
- Race
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Self-confidence
- Support
- Survival

Thinking Critically

1) “The state of Maryland had one of the highest graduation rates in the nation. Seventy-six percent of high school students who began high school in Maryland completed. In Baltimore County, the number was as high as 85 percent in some years. But in Baltimore City…it was a dismal 38 percent. For many in the
audience, this was the first high school graduation they had ever attended.” – pg. 108
a. What factors could have led to the dramatic differences between graduation rates in the county versus the city?

2) “The irony of the situation forced me to smile, featuring my newly cracked tooth. Years earlier, I had run through these same woods with all of my might, looking for safety, trying to get away from campus. Tonight, I ran through the same woods looking for safety, but in the other direction.” – pg. 122

a. Reflect on your own experiences. Have you ever been unhappy or dissatisfied with a situation that ended up turning into a great experience? Explain.

3) “My mouth was aching. I was beside myself with anger—and still confused. And embarrassed. Embarrassed to be called a nigger in front of my comrade. And embarrassed by my reaction. Because after being called a nigger and having my tooth broken, I’d decided to flee back to campus. Should I have stayed there in the middle of the street, waiting for the boys to come back, somehow gotten them out of their car, and tested them blow for blow? Part of me was aghast when I decided that the answer was no.” – pg. 121

a. Wes experienced a variety of emotions after being hit and called a derogatory name. Why do you think embarrassment seemed to be the primary emotion?
b. Had the other Wes been in this situation, how might he have reacted? If you think he would have reacted differently than Wes, explain the factors you think would have led him to that reaction.

Thought Provoking Quotes

“Wes stood on the corner in Dundee Village. He no longer lived there, but he had a little operation there—he would bring drugs into the county because he could sell them for a higher premium than in the city. He was surrounded by some guys from his crew...He had to get moving, but he lingered. He liked the feeling of holding down a corner with his boys. It was the one place he felt safe, or at least in his element.” – pg. 112

Topics to Explore

“This was the crew. They would work together, fight together, stay together. An unbreakable bond united the crew—for many members, it was the only support system they had. It was family.” – pg. 111

• EXPLORE the variety in family dynamics (family doesn’t always have to be flesh and blood), and the different types of support they can provide.
"Think about it, man. It’s simple math. Only 60 players are chosen in the NBA draft every year. There are 341 Division One schools, each with 13 players on the roster. This makes 4,433 college players who could declare eligibility for the NBA draft. These numbers don’t even include Division Two or Three players. Or international players, for that matter.’ My uncle had obviously been practicing this speech. The dose of reality hidden in the impressive math exhibition was beginning to bother me, so I cut him off and asked him if he wanted to get another game going. A small smile appeared on his face again, and he pulled himself up using the metal fence that surrounded the court as support.” – pg. 116

- **EXPLORE** the power of mentoring; the difference between listening and understanding versus just hearing someone.

“I felt like being at military school was keeping me in a bubble, ignorant of what was going on with my people on the outside. There was a comfortable distance between my life now and the levels of confusion that had engulfed me just a few years ago. This uniform had become a force field that kept the craziness of the world outside from getting too close to me, but I wondered if it was just an illusion.” – pg. 118

- **EXPLORE** the idea of having two or more “worlds”, and how trying to reconcile them can be a struggle; how living in a place some could consider a “bubble” can be beneficial or detrimental to one’s development.

“I’d only waded into street life in the Bronx; I never got into its deepest, darkest waters. But I’d been around enough street cats to know the code: they hit you with a knife, you find a gun. And I didn’t have to be a Black Panther to know that nigger was the ultimate fighting word. This was the kind of knowledge we understood, the kind of code that was so deeply fundamental it never had to be fully articulated. But I had to let this one go. I had to look at the bigger picture. My assailant was unknown, unnamed, and in a car. This was not a fair fight, and the best-case scenario was nowhere near as probable as the worst-case scenario. If I was successful, who knew how the fight would have ended? If I failed, who knew how the fight would’ve ended?” – pg. 121

- **EXPLORE** how Wes’s critical thinking skills developed, and the effect it had on how he made decisions. Discuss Wes’s belief that inherently, some words and situations warrant certain reactions.
Part III: Paths Taken and Expectations Fulfilled
Chapter 7: The Land that God Forgot (1997)

“Author” Wes

As Wes got closer to graduating from Valley Forge, his athletic skills became his focus. The New York Times featured him in an article, and colleges avidly recruited him. However, “as I began to play against nationally ranked players at various tournaments and campus, I realized that the disparity between my potential and theirs was glaring. I played hard while they played easy, with a gracefulness and effortlessness that I lacked. When you step on the court with players like Kobe Bryant or six foot eight point guards who can dunk from the free throw line, your mind begins to concentrate on your other options,” like education (pg. 130).

Though he had never enjoyed reading, Wes eventually came to love it when he read books with characters he could relate to. He learned from such people as “The Fab Five,” Colin Powell, and Malcolm X. “As I started to think seriously about how I could become the person I wanted to be, I looked around at some of the people who'd had the biggest impact on my life. Aside from family and friends, the men I most trusted all had something in common: they all wore the uniform of the United States of America… I thought about Rear Admiral Hill, the former superintendent of the Naval Academy, who served as the president of Valley Forge in my last three years of high school. Admiral Hill…always made it a point to know the names and stories of as many cadets as he could. He also taught me an important lesson about leadership: it always comes with having to make tough decisions,” pg. 132.

The various leaders he had encountered at Valley Forge had helped him learn about leadership and decision-making. All of these influences helped Wes decide to stay at Valley Forge for junior college in order to go through the early commissioning process and become a second lieutenant in the Army.

At age 18, Wes became the regimental commander for the 70th Corps of Cadets, which made him the highest-ranking cadet in a corps of 700+ students. He would now take on a role that would likely have him leading people twice his age. He was also required to become a qualified paratrooper. Though he and his fellow airmen were incredibly nervous to jump out of a plane, they obeyed their training and made a successful jump.

The “Other” Wes

Wes comes home to find Cheryl, the mother of his third and fourth children, high from heroin while she is pregnant. He hadn't wanted to believe it, but he can see now that she is a drug addict. Once he is sure she has not overdosed, he leaves the house without a clear destination. He realizes he is tired of the drug game, and of being arrested, and of watching drugs destroy his family and community. After walking a long way, he ends up at his friend Levy’s house.

Levy had decided to leave the game a couple months ago. Wes told him he was ready to get out, too. Levy talk to him about Job Corps, a program that helps people get their GED and gives them vocational training. Wes is ready to try anything, so he goes with Levy to get more information about the program. Two weeks later, he is on his way to the Job Corps campus in another county in Maryland.
When Wes arrives, he sees dorms, lawns, basketball courts, and more—everything he imagines is on a college campus, which he has never visited before. He rooms with Levy, and gets off to a great start. He completes his GED in one month, and is soon helping others study. Wes has become a leader among the Job Corps participants. When he is asked to select vocational training, he chooses carpentry. He enjoys the work and the teacher, and thinks it suits him. He builds a play house for his daughter, which is by far the most advanced project in the class. Wes graduates from Job Corps in just seven months.

When he gets back to Baltimore, he finds some temporary work landscaping and working on homes. After those jobs end, he works in food service. However, none of these jobs pay more than $9 an hour and Wes begins feeling frustrated. Alicia and Cheryl are both demanding more money, and he feels obligated to give his mother money since she is basically raising his and Cheryl’s children. One day, as he leaves his food service job at the mall, he stops by his old neighborhood. He picks up a package that contains the ingredients to make cocaine. “While at the Job Corps Center, Wes had felt his problems floating off in the soft country air of Laurel. A year after graduating, he realized they had not disappeared—they’d simply returned to Baltimore, waiting for him to come back. In his absence, they’d compounded. Tears welled in Wes’s eyes but never fell. He’d realized long ago that crying does no good,” (pg. 145). Though he wants to stay out of the game, he feels like he doesn’t have a choice if he wants to provide for his family.

Themes for Exploration and Interpretation

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Thinking Critically

1) “Do you think we’re all just products of our environments?” His [the “other” Wes’s] smile dissolved into a smirk, with the left side of his face resting at ease. ‘I think so, or maybe products of our expectations.’ ‘Others’ expectations of us or our expectations for ourselves?’ ‘I mean other’s expectations that you take on as your own.’ I (“author” Wes) realized then how difficult it is to separate the two. The expectations that others place on us help us form our expectations of ourselves. ‘We will do what others expect of us,’ [“other”] Wes said. ‘If they expect us to graduate, we will graduate. If they expect us to get a job, we will get a job. If they expect us to go to jail, then that’s where we will end up too. At
some point you lose control.’ I sympathized with him, but I recoiled from his ability to shed responsibility seamlessly and drape it at the feet of others. ‘True, but it’s easy to lose control when you were never looking for it in the first place.” – Introduction, ch. 7

a. Do you think what others expect of us has an effect on how we behave?
b. What expectations do you feel others have for you?
c. What expectations do you have for yourself?

2) “Just as military school had slowly grown on me, so had academic life. I actually liked reading now. My mother, sensing my apathy toward reading, had bought me the Mitch Albom book Fab Five. The book is about the Michigan basketball team led by Chris Webber, Jalen Rose, and Juwan Howard, a team with five freshman starters who made it all the way to the championship game…I was riveted by that book…I finished Fab Five in two days. The book itself wasn’t what was important…but my mother used it as a hook into a deeper lesson: that the written word isn’t necessarily a chore but can be a window into new worlds.” – pg. 130-131

a. What do you think is the point of a common reading experience (such as Book-in-Common)?

3) “The sight of her coming off her high, stumbling to the bathroom, disgusted Wes. He saw this every day. The people who would line up around the corner for drugs. The people who would do anything to score. He knew these people because he was the one who got them what they needed. It was his job. And it pained him to realize that the mother of his children (Cheryl) was just like them…Wes was tired. Tired of being locked up, tired of watching drugs destroy entire families, communities, an entire city. He was tired of being shot at and having to attend the funerals of his friends. He understood that his thoughts contradicted his actions; he had long since accepted that. It was just that his tolerance of his own hypocrisy was wearing thin.” – pg. 138

a. Seeing Cheryl high disgusted Wes to the point of wanting to be out of the drug game. Why do you think this event was significant enough to cause this reaction, when so many other significant events had not?
b. Reflect on your own experiences. Have your thoughts and actions ever contradicted each other?

Thought Provoking Quotes

“As I started to think seriously about how I could become the person I wanted to be, I looked around at some of the people who’d had the biggest impact on my life. Aside from family and friends, the men I most trusted all had something in common: they all wore the uniform of the United States of America…I thought about Rear Admiral Hill, the former superintendent of the Naval Academy, who served as the president of Valley
Forge in my last three years of high school. Admiral Hill…always made it a point to know the names and stories of as many cadets as he could. He also taught me an important lesson about leadership: it always comes with having to make tough decisions.” – pg. 132

“When it is time for you to leave this school, leave your job, or even leave this earth, you make sure you have worked hard to make sure it mattered you were ever here.’ The notion that life is transient, that it can come and go quickly, unexpectedly, had been with me since I had seen my own father die. In the Bronx, the idea of life’s impermanence underlined everything for kids my age—it drove some of us to a paralyzing apathy, stopped us from even thinking too far into the future. Others were driven to what, in retrospect, was a sort of permanent state of mourning: for our loved ones, who always seemed at risk, and for our own lives, which felt so fragile and vulnerable. But I started to see it a little differently that day. Life’s impermanence, I realized, is what makes every single day so precious. It’s what shapes our time here. It’s what makes it so important that not a single moment be wasted.” – pg. 133

“While at the Job Corps Center, Wes had felt his problems floating off in the soft country air of Laurel. A year after graduating, he realized they had not disappeared—they’d simply returned to Baltimore, waiting for him to come back. In his absence, they’d compounded. Tears welled in Wes’s eyes but never fell. He’d realized long ago that crying does no good.” – pg. 145

**Topics to Explore**

“As my high school career was coming to an end, I was still being avidly recruited by college programs…I got a firsthand taste of the athletic campus visitation process, complete with young and attractive “tour guides” who showed me around and made me feel welcome—and wanted. It was a seductive ego stroke. Initially, it just reinforced my belief that I was special, that I was chosen. The young female admirers who seemed to come along with the package added to the allure. But eventually, all of those treats started to feel meaningless.” – pg. 130

- **EXPLORE** the treatment given to student athletes and other college student subcultures. Discuss whether there are unique expectations placed on student athletes by their community.

After receiving his GED from Job Corps: “His quick success had Wes thinking differently about his life…Many of the other students were now looking to Wes for help with their GED prep, for assistance with their personal issues, and for friendship. Just as he had on the corners of Baltimore, Wes became a leader.” – pg. 142

- **EXPLORE** how personality traits (like leadership) are displayed even in different environments; how opportunity can change outlook.
Chapter 8: Surrounded (2000)

The “Other” Wes

Mary is watching the evening news, and a story stops her in her tracks. A few days earlier, four masked men broke into a jewelry store and ordered everyone to get down. One of the people in the store was Sergeant Bruce Prothero, a veteran of the Baltimore City police department who worked as a security guard at the jewelry store to help support his wife and five children. He was forced down with everyone else as the masked men stole $438,000 worth of jewelry and watches. Once they had what they wanted, they ran out to the getaway car.

Prothero ran after them but didn’t see them. He crouched down behind a car to plan his next move. He didn’t see one of the masked men pull out a gun before he was shot three times at point blank range. He was able to stumble back toward the jewelry store but died before police got to the scene.

Police were very determined to catch the suspects since they had killed a fellow officer. A break in the case came quickly when one of the suspects tried to sell some of the stolen watches to a drug dealer that had a wiretap on his phone. When police tracked him down, he admitted to being involved but insisted he was not the shooter. The next day, another suspect was caught, but he also insisted he was not the shooter, and that he had been unarmed. Mary was deeply saddened when her sons’ faces flashed across the television screen as the remaining two suspects.

Police search Mary’s house and question her on her sons’ whereabouts. She has not heard from them in days. The police grudgingly accept her explanation, but do not leave the Moore family alone. A cousin’s wedding is disrupted a few days later, and all of the family members questioned. Unbeknownst to the family or the police, Tony and Wes had escaped to an uncle’s house in Philadelphia.

It does not take long for police to catch up to them. They catch Tony first, as he walks out the door of his uncle’s house, followed by Wes, when he comes down the stairs a moment later. They’re arrested and put in jail along with the other two suspects. Tony and the other two perpetrators were found guilty and sentenced to life in prison without parole. Wes insisted he was not there the day of the robbery and murder, so he took his case to trial. The jury found Wes guilty and sentenced him to life in prison without parole. “The guards placed their hands on Wes and shuffled him away. The hands of the state would stay on him for the rest of his life. Wes had spent much of his adolescence incarcerated, and he knew that occasional bids in the pen were part of the game. But he’d never figured this. Maybe it was because he’d never thought long term about his life at all. Early losses condition you to believe that short-term plans are always smarter. Now Wes’s mind wandered to the long term for the first time. Finally, he could see his future” (pg. 157).

“Author” Wes

After completing his junior college requirements and becoming a second lieutenant in the Army Reserve, Wes returned to Baltimore. He had been accepted at Johns Hopkins University, much to the delight of his mother, who was living there again. Though he was not originally sold on the idea of attending Johns Hopkins, his adviser at...
Valley Forge put him in contact with the assistant director of admissions and Wes agreed to have lunch with him. He challenged Wes’s assumptions and perceptions of the school, and encouraged him to apply. Wes applied but didn’t think he would get in due to his standardized test scores being lower than the admission standards. However, a few months later, Wes received notice that not only had he been accepted, but he would receive scholarship money to attend. “Having an advocate on the inside—someone who had gotten to know me and understood my story on a personal level—had obviously helped. It made me think deeply about the way privilege and preference work in the world, and how many kids who didn’t have ‘luck’ like mine in this instance would find themselves forever outside the ring of power and prestige. So many opportunities in this country are apportioned in this arbitrary and miserly way, distributed to those who already have the benefit of a privileged legacy,” (pg. 160-61).

While at Johns Hopkins, Wes interned with Mayor Schmoke, the mayor of Baltimore. One day, the mayor asked Wes what he planned to do after he graduated. Wes didn’t really know. The mayor talked to Wes about the Rhodes scholarship, and how he had received it, along with other influential people in the United States, such as President Bill Clinton. He encouraged Wes to apply for the opportunity, but before doing so, to make sure he understood the history behind the scholarship. Since Wes was getting ready to study abroad in South Africa for the semester, the mayor suggested he take that time to explore the idea.

Wes arrived in Langa, South Africa in January, and was taken to what would be his home for the next six months. He was greeted warmly by “Mama,” and her two children, Zinzi and Viwe, who were members of the Xhosa tribe. During his time there, he learned a lot from his host family, including the concept of ubuntu, the Xhosa word for humanity. Ubuntu, a way of life supported by their leaders, like Nelson Mandela, helped Wes frame his entire experience in South Africa.

While in South Africa, Wes became good friends with Zinzi. A few weeks before Wes was to return to America, Zinzi explained that he was also about to embark on a journey. His journey would be into manhood, which was a four-week trip into the wilderness with Xhosa elders. When young men go on the trip they are circumcised to symbolize the removal of childish cloaks. As they spend the rest of the weeks healing, they learn the history of the Xhosa people and lands. They also learn the values of good husbands and fathers. Upon their return, they dress all in white and are treated to a large feast. They are treated as men, with respect and admiration from their families and community.

Though Wes could not imagine the painful ritual Zinzi was about to undergo, when he saw a young man in the village dressed in all white, he understood where the man’s confidence came from and respected the journey. Wes understood that even though he did not have the same journey, he was also on the road to becoming a man.
Themes for Exploration and Interpretation

Ambition  Mentoring
Community  Opportunity
Consequences  Parental/Familial Pressure & Influence
Cultural Pressure & Influence  Perspective
Decision-making  Poverty
Defeat  Privilege
Economic Injustice  Respect
Education  Responsibility
Environment  Success
Fate  Support
Hope  Wisdom

Thinking Critically

1) “While reading the [Johns Hopkins acceptance] letter, I thought about Paul White [Johns Hopkins admissions officer]. Having an advocate on the inside—someone who had gotten to know me and understood my story on a personal level—had obviously helped. It made me think deeply about the way privilege and preference work in the world, and how many kids who didn't have “luck” like mine in this instance would find themselves forever outside the ring of power and prestige. So many opportunities in this country are apportioned in this arbitrary and miserly way, distributed to those who already have the benefit of a privileged legacy.” – pg. 160-61

a. How did having this inside connection affect the course of Wes’s adult life?
b. Reflect on your own experiences. Have you ever been accepted, or given priority for something, because you had an inside connection? Explain.
c. Have you ever not been accepted, or given priority for something, because someone else had an inside connection? Explain.

2) “Living in the Bronx and Baltimore had given me the foolish impression that I knew what poverty looked like. At that moment, I realized I had no idea what poverty was—even in West Baltimore we lived like kings compared with this (the shantytown in South Africa). An embarrassing sense of pride tentatively bloomed in the middle of the sadness I felt at my surroundings.” – pg. 166

a. Why do you think we naturally try to place ourselves above others?
b. Reflect on your own experiences. Have you ever felt embarrassed by an emotion or situation that you felt placed you “above” another person or group? Explain.
Thought Provoking Quotes

“Midnight passed, and one day turned to the next. Mary could not sleep. She felt terrible about the death of the police officer. She prayed her sons were not responsible. As she lay in bed, she realized that, no matter what the outcome, all of their lives had changed forever.” – pg. 149

“The sentence was indeed life in prison without the possibility of parole. The guards placed their hands on Wes and shuffled him away. The hands of the state would stay on him for the rest of his life. Wes had spent much of his adolescence incarcerated, and he knew that occasional bids in the pen were part of the game. But he’d never figured this. Maybe it was because he’d never thought long term about his life at all. Early losses condition you to believe that short-term plans are always smarter. Now Wes’s mind wandered to the long term for the first time. Finally, he could see his future.” – pg. 157

“The common bond of humanity and decency that we share is stronger than any conflict, any adversity, any challenge. Fighting for your convictions is important. But finding peace is paramount. Knowing when to fight and when to seek peace is wisdom.” – pg. 168

“Here (South Africa), burgeoning manhood was guided and celebrated through a rite of passage. At home, burgeoning manhood was a trigger for apprehension. In the United States, we see these same faces, and our reflex is to pick up our pace and cross the street. And in this reflexive gesture, the dimensions of our tragedy are laid bare. Our young men—along with our young women—are our strength and our future. Yet we fear them. This tall South African who now captured my attention wore his manhood as a sign of accomplishment, a badge of honor. His process was a journey taken with his peers, guided by his elders, and completed in a celebration. He was now a man. His community welcomed him. His tribe’s influence in making him a man was obvious and indelible. At that moment, I realized the journey I took was never mine alone either. Our eyes met, and he smiled and nodded his head. I nodded my head in return.” – pg. 170-71
Topics to Explore

“Mary’s niece, Nicey’s daughter, was moments away from walking down the aisle at her wedding…the veiled bride began her slow procession toward the altar. She walked alone down the aisle as the well-wishers in the pews stood and smiled. Tony was supposed to walk arm in arm with his cousin and give her away—her father had never been involved in her life. Her unescorted stroll down the aisle was a subtle reminder that the manhunt for two of Maryland’s most wanted was still on, now in day five.” – pg. 151

- **EXPLORE** the lack of male presence in the lives of many of the people described in *The Other Wes Moore*—the possible factors contributing to it and the effects it may have had on their development.

“The newspapers and television networks ran nonstop coverage of the arrest. Civic leaders held press conferences praising the work of the police officers. The county executive of Baltimore County helped lead a telethon that raised money for the widow of Sergeant Prothero and his children. As word spread, a collective sigh of relief seeped through Baltimore’s brisk winter air. At home, Mary wept.” – pg. 155

- **EXPLORE** the intense focus media places on how a tragic event (such as a murder) affects a victim’s family and friends, and the lack of sympathy toward the suspect’s family and friends who are experiencing the same event from a different perspective.

“…to simply walk along the pristine Inner Harbor or go see the Orioles in action without understanding that all of Baltimore is not downtown would be…misleading. The truth is that there are two Baltimores. Almost every other major city in this country leads the same double life.” – pg. 158-59

- **EXPLORE** the differences within cities, making sure to explore factors like race, socioeconomic status, education level, etc.
Epilogue

The “Other” Wes

Wes Moore has been in the Jessup Correctional Institution in Maryland since 2000. He works as a carpenter, has become a devout Muslim, and is a leader within that religious community. His family visits him occasionally. At the time The Other Wes Moore was written, Wes Moore was 33 years old, serving the 10th year of a life sentence, and had just become a grandfather.

Mary is raising six children—three of Wes’s kids, her niece, her nephew, and her youngest son.

Tony was also sentenced to life in prison without parole. He died in 2008 from kidney failure at 38 years old.

Though Woody was in and out of trouble, and White Boy never got his high school degree, both of Wes’s good friends eventually cleaned up their act. They hold steady jobs and are active members of each other’s lives.

Alicia only raises one of her two children she had with Wes. She lives near Mary in Aberdeen, Maryland, about an hour from the city.

Cheryl continued to battle drug addiction. At 24, she fell down a flight of stairs and was paralyzed. Complications from her injuries led to her death soon after.

“Author” Wes

Wes Moore received the Rhodes scholarship to study at Oxford. He spent two and a half years there completing a master’s degree in international relations. Upon returning to the United States, he interned in Washington, D.C. to learn about homeland security issues. He followed that by working on Wall Street learning about high finance. While working there, the United States was fighting wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Wes decided to take a leave of absence to join the fight overseas. He served on the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan for almost a year. When he returned to the United States, he was accepted into the White House Fellow program as a special assistant to Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice. He spent that time watching the sorts of policies he acted out in Afghanistan get formulated. Wes also married his wife Dawn that same year. Sometime in 2007, Wes Moore began writing The Other Wes Moore.

Joy retired from her job with a foundation for disadvantaged children and now runs her own consultancy firm. She lives just outside the city.

Nikki runs an event-planning business in Virginia. Shani graduated from Princeton, and then attended Stanford Law School. She lives in Los Angeles with her husband.

Justin finished high school and college, despite numerous setbacks: his mother’s death from Hodgkin’s disease, his father’s death in a house fire, and his own battle with a rare form of cancer. He now works in education as the dean of prestigious high school in Philadelphia. He was co-host man at Wes’s wedding.

Uncle Howard, the other best man at the wedding, and Captain Ty Hill, a groomsman at the wedding, both remain mentors, guides, and friends to Wes.

Wes’s grandfather died in 2005 from stomach cancer. Though the Army tried to get Wes to the Bronx from Afghanistan in time to say goodbye, he passed before Wes
got there. He was able to attend the funeral, along with hundreds of others paying their respects.

Wes’s grandmother is in her eighties and still living in the same house in the Bronx that Wes and his family shared with them for a time. She is still fiercely protective and supportive of her family.

Thought Provoking Quotes

“Spending so much time with my fellow soldiers reminded me why I’d joined the military. The camaraderie, intensity, and passion for the job, and the sense of duty to something larger than myself, was something I had missed desperately...We felt the joy of a mission accomplished and the heartache of a lost comrade. To serve with young people and the young at heart alike, who live without a fear of dying and who talk about commitment, integrity, and sacrifice without a hint of sarcasm, was refreshing. I could not be more proud of my brothers and sisters in battle. That pride is a badge of honor emblazoned on my heart and will be until my last breath.” – pg. 177, Epilogue

“And when I finish my story, the question that comes up the most is the one that initiated this quest: ‘What made the difference?’ And the truth is that I don’t know. The answer is elusive. People are so wildly different, and it’s hard to know when genetics or environment or just bad luck is decisive. As I’ve puzzled over the issue, I’ve become convinced that there are some clear and powerful measures that can be taken during this crucial time in a young person’s life. Some of the ones that helped me come to mind, from finding strong mentors to being entrusted with responsibilities that forced me to get serious about my behavior. There is no one thing that leads people to move in one direction or another. I think the best we can do is give our young people a chance to make the best decisions possible by providing them with the information and the tools and the support they need.” – pg. 179, Epilogue

“When we’re young, it sometimes seems as if the world doesn’t exist outside our city, our block, our house, our room. We make decisions based on what we see in that limited world and follow the only models available. The most important thing that happened to me was not being physically transported—the moves from Baltimore to the Bronx to Valley Forge didn’t change my way of thinking. What changed was that I found myself surround by people—starting with my mom, grandparents, uncles, and aunts, and leading to a string of wonderful role models and mentors—who kept pushing me to see more than what was directly in front of me, to see the boundless possibilities of the wider world and the unexplored possibilities within myself. People who taught me that no accident of birth—not being black or relatively poor, being from Baltimore or the Bronx or fatherless—would ever define or limit me. In other words, they helped me to discover what it means to be free. As I wrote at the outset of this book: The chilling truth is that Wes’s story could have been mine; the tragedy is that my story could have been his. My only wish—and I know Wes feels the same—is that boys (and girls) who come after us will know this freedom. It’s up to us, all of us, to make a way for them.” – pg. 179-80, Epilogue
“After the hardcover edition of this book came out, the most common question I got at events and interviews was the question I’d explicitly avoided answering in the book itself: what made the difference between you and the other Wes Moore? I’d avoided answering the question in part because I found it difficult to put my finger on the exact moment or opportunity—or missed opportunity—that made the difference in my life. Many readers came up with their own answers to the question of what made the difference…(mentors, different levels of cultural capital, indifference to birth control)...But what all these responses have in common is that they point to the decisive power of information and stories—the kind provided and modeled by friends, family, mentors, or even books—which has only reinforced my initial decision to write this story in the first place. It was reading Colin Powell’s My American Journey as a young man that made me realize the incredible power of stories to change people’s lives. By establishing himself as the protagonist of his own story, he inspired me and countless other young people to see ourselves as capable of taking control of our own destinies, and to realize how each decision we make determines the course of our life stories. I hope the story of my life and Wes’s will serve a similar function in the lives of readers.” – pg. 182, Afterword

“Above all, I hope that this book can provide young people with a way to identify with success as a possibility, and a reason to believe that a story that begins with a struggle, apathy, and the pain of loss can still have a happy ending.” – pg. 183, Afterword

“In the eternal words of Sir William Ernest Henley:

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.”
– pg. 183, Afterword
More Questions to Consider

The discussion questions listed below can be used to begin a conversation about the themes (listed on pg. 6 of this guide) found throughout *The Other Wes Moore*. This listing is not inclusive of all possible discussion questions sparked by the text, nor does it cover all the themes found in the text; the number of topics that could be discussed is practically endless! Questions can be used for in-class discussion, essay prompts, out-of-class discussion board topics, and more. We encourage you to use articles, media, presenters, etc. to supplement your discussion.

The power of decision-making is one of the most prominent themes in *The Other Wes Moore*.

- **What decisions have you made today that could impact the rest of your life?**
- **Reflect on your own experiences.** What other themes, topics, or “life lessons” from *The Other Wes Moore* were significant for you? Why are they significant?

Joy’s first husband physically and verbally abused her, which is why she reacted so harshly when a young Wes hit his sister.

- **Do you believe abuse is inherited (nature), learned (nurture), or both? Support your opinion.**

Wes’s father dies of a treatable infection when doctors dismissed his symptoms.

- **How do stereotypes affect the way people treat others?**
- **What would you want healthcare professionals to think about before they judge someone by the way they look?**
- **If you were the nurse or doctor who saw Wes’s father that day, what would your impression have been?**

Wes’s father dies when Wes is very young.

- **How do you think this event helped to shape Wes as he developed into a man?**
- **Reflect on your own experiences.** What significant people, events, places, ideas, etc. have shaped your development, and how?

In school, Wes often struggled to find the place where he “fit.” At his private school, he was “too black” and in his neighborhood in the Bronx, he was “too white.” Wes felt like he had to “act white” or “act black” depending on which environment he was in.

- **How do you think this affected the development of Wes’s identity?**
- **Reflect on your own experiences.** Have you ever felt you had to act a certain way, or hide a particular part of yourself, depending on the environment you were in at the time? How did this make you feel?
Both Wes Moores felt deep connections to their respective communities, despite some of the negative influences found within them.

- **What do you think helped form those connections?**
- **How are strong communities formed?**
- **Why do you think strong communities are sometimes formed around negative influences (such as drugs)?**

Both the Wes Moores found solace and strength in music and sports.

- **What role do you think music plays in communities?**
  - In regards to hip-hop specifically, is it a positive or negative role?
- **What role do you think sports and games play in communities?**
  - In regards to the specific sports mentioned in “The Other Wes Moore” (basketball and football), is it a positive or negative role? Support your opinions.

Both Wes Moores often lament the cyclical nature of their communities: to provide a better life for yourself and your family, you need an education and a job, but to get an education and a job, you need money.

- **It can be difficult to stop the cycle of poverty, violence, etc. in a family or community. What is one way that you think these could be overcome?**
- **Reflect on your own experiences.** Have you ever felt you had no choice in what action to take due to the repeating nature of a problem or situation? How did this make you feel? How did you resolve the problem or situation?

At the end of the book, Wes intentionally does not tell you what decisions are the “right” decisions.

- **Why do you think he leaves it up to you? If you were Wes, would you have told the readers what path to take?**
General Quotes

“One of us is free and has experienced things that he never even knew to dream about as a kid. The other will spend every day until his death behind bars for an armed robbery that left a police officer and father of five dead. The chilling truth is that his story could have been mine. The tragedy is that my story could have been his. Our stories are obviously specific to our two lives, but I hope they will illuminate the crucial inflection points in every life, the sudden moments of decision where our paths diverge and our fates are sealed. It’s unsettling to know how little separates each of us from another life altogether.” -*Wes Moore*, pg. xi

“I was taught to remember, but never question. Wes was taught to forget, and never ask why.” -*Wes Moore*, pg. 4

“By the end of the Riots, Baltimore stood eerily quiet. Almost $14 million in damage was recorded, and nearly five thousand men, women, and children were arrested, injured, or dead. Mary was only a kid, but she made a pact with herself at that moment: she would get her education and leave the neighborhood no matter what it took.” -*Wes Moore*, pg. 19

“Young boys are more likely to believe in themselves if they know that there’s someone, somewhere, who shares that belief. To carry the burden of belief alone is too much for most young shoulders.” -*Wes Moore*, pg. 28

“Later in life I learned that the way many governors projected the numbers of beds they’d need for prison facilities was by examining the reading scores of third graders. Elected officials deduced that a strong percentage of kids reading below their grade level by third grade would be needing a secure place to stay when they got older.” -*Wes Moore*, pg. 54

“When did I actually become a man? There was no official ceremony that brought my childhood to an end. Instead, crises or other circumstances presented me with adult-sized responsibilities and obligations that I had to meet one way or another.” (p.66) “From everything you told me, both of us did some pretty wrong stuff when we were younger. And both of us had second chances. But if the situation or the context where you make the decisions don’t change, then second chances don’t mean too much, huh? I sat back, allowing Wes’s words to sink in. Then I responded, ‘I guess it’s hard sometimes to distinguish between second chances and last chances.’” -*The two Wes’s speaking to each other*, pg.67

“My obsession with hip-hop kept me credible with the kids in my neighborhood. It let them know that, regardless of my school affiliation, I still understood. Hip-hop also gave the kids in my school a point of entry into my life: Public Enemy’s black nationalist anthems or KRS-One’s pulpy fantasies about gunning down crack dealers offered a window into a world that before hip-hop had seemed foreign to those who even dared to look through.” -*Wes Moore*, pg. 76

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“These forks in the road can happen so fast for young boys; within months or even weeks, their journeys can take a decisive and possibly irrevocable turn. With no intervention—or the wrong intervention—they can be lost forever. My mother made the decision to intervene—and decided that overdoing it was better than doing nothing at all.”  
-Wes Moore, pg. 94

“Having an advocate on the inside—someone who had gotten to know me and understood my story on a personal level—had obviously helped. It made me think deeply about the way privilege and preference work in the world, and how many kinds who didn’t have “luck” like mine in this instance would find themselves forever outside the ring of power and prestige. So many opportunities in this country are apportioned in this arbitrary and miserly way, distributed to those who already have the benefit or a privileged legacy.”  
-Wes Moore, pg. 161

“‘And when I finish my story, the question that comes up the most is the one that initiated this quest. What made the difference?’ And the truth is that I don’t know. The answer is elusive. People are so wildly different, and it’s hard to know when genetics or environment or just bad luck is decisive. As I’ve puzzled over the issue, I’ve become convinced that there are some clear and powerful measures that can be taken during this crucial time in a young person’s life. Some of the ones that helped me come to mind, from finding strong mentors to being entrusted with responsibilities that forced me to get serious about my behavior. There is no one thing that leads people to move in one direction or another. I think the best we can do is give our young people a chance to make the best decisions possible by providing them with the information and tools and the support they need.”  
-Wes Moore, pg. 179

“Fundamentally, this story is about two boys, each of whom was going through his own personal journey and searching for help. One of them received it; the other didn’t. And now the world stands witness to the results. Small interactions and effortless acts of kindness can mean the difference between failure and success, pain and pleasure—or becoming the people we loathe or love to become. We are more powerful that we realize, and I urge you to internalize the meanings of this remarkable story and unleash your own power.”  
-Call to Action by Tavis Smiley, pg. 182
This instructor’s guide for *The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates* was authored by Brittany Blake, Project Coordinator for the Office of First Year Initiatives. It was edited by Katie Partin, Program Coordinator, Sr. for the Office of First Year Initiatives.