TEENS IN VIOLENT SITUATIONS: THE IMPORTANCE OF INCLUDING THE Works OF WALTER DEAN MYERS AS PART OF A PUBLIC LIBRARY COLLECTION

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Walter Dean Myers

• Born in 1937, in Virginia
• Mother died at 2 years old
• Raised as a foster child in Harlem, New York
• Suffers from a severe speech impediment
• Dropped out of high school to join the army
• Wrote his first book in 1969.

Most well known for his young adult works of Realistic Fiction
Collection of Works

Include Slam, Monster, Shooter, the Beast, Glory Field, Fallen Angels, Sunrise over Fallujah, and Hoops
Types of Characters

Young Teenage Males

Violent backgrounds and placed in violent situations

• War
• Street violence/gangs
• Drug Use

Characters are placed in real life situations

Violence is a part of their every day lives
What makes Walter Dean Myer’s books controversial

Fallen Angels – vulgar language, sexual content, and violent imagery

Monster – vulgar language, sexual content, and violent imagery

Sunrise Over Fallujah – vulgar language, sexual content, and violent imagery

All three books deal with the topic of teenage boys in violent situations and environments
Groups which have challenged or may be likely to challenge the books:

- Parents
- School administrators
- Religious groups
- Parents Against Bad Books in Schools
- Safelibraries.org.

Reasons the books are or may be challenged:

- Offensive language
- Racial insults
- Sexual content
- Drug abuse
- Violence
- Religious or family values
- Age appropriateness
Importance of work

• Provides a window into a world many would never experience

• Readers are exposed to violence “at a safe distance”

• Readers can form their own opinions of characters

• Important to expose these experiences and tragic lives to teens
Importance of Works (cont.)

• How Characters face their fears
• How Characters cope with their violent lives
• Real life consequences and responsibilities
Review of *Fallen Angels*

“Myers continues to demonstrate his mastery of the young adult novel in this work many still consider to be among his best. Seventeen-year-old Richie Perry has to grow up quickly as he confronts the brutality of the war in Vietnam.” (1989 Coretta Scott King Author Award Winner, 1988 BBYA) (Taylor, 2009).
Review of *Sunrise Over Fallujah*

"Myers brilliantly freeze-frames the opening months of the current Iraq War by realistically capturing its pivotal moments in 2003 and creating a vivid setting. Memorable characters share instances of wry levity that balance the story without deflecting its serious tone. Through precise, believable dialogue as the catalyst, Myers's expert portrayal of a soldier's feelings and perspectives at the onset of this controversial war allows the circumstances to speak for themselves."

— *School Library Journal*
“This trail blazing novel, with its unique narrative style, not only received a Coretta Scott King author honor award and a place on BBYA, it was the first recipient of the Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature- Steve Harmon, the young narrator, uses the form of a screen play script to make sense of the terrible predicament in which he finds himself: an accused accomplice to murder.”

Depriving young adults the opportunity to read Fallen Angels is an injustice due to the fact that some people fail to look past profane language or violence and see the true message of Myers’ work. (Wright, 2006).

“Through careful examination of texts, students can learn to identify and critique patterns of thought and social values that contribute to violence” (Franzak and Noll, 2006)

“Growing up is a daunting and sometimes overwhelming experience. Being able to explore the scale and nature of the very real moral and aesthetic challenges that surround them within the security of the fictional boundary...is important to young people” (Mackey, 2003).
“War appeals to boys and men. It's exciting and adventuresome…What I did not want it to be was the usual one-sided idea which eliminates the pain and horror. I wanted this glimpse of violence for the young reader. I enlisted in the army after reading a lot of poetry about war and seeing a few war movies. I expected war to be one long romantic adventure.” (Wright, 2006).

“I write books for the troubled boy I once was, and for the boy who lives within me still.” (Myers, 2009).
Reading about teens who are faced with violent situations or who express violent tendencies allows youth to realize that these behaviors exist and can be dealt with. In a pamphlet on recognizing the warning signs of youth violence, the American Psychology Association wrote, “Often people who act violently have trouble controlling their feelings.” (APA, 2013). Books such as the works of Myers allow youth to explore their feelings and garner an insight into the consequences of violent actions.


References (cont.)