

THE OTHER WES MOORE

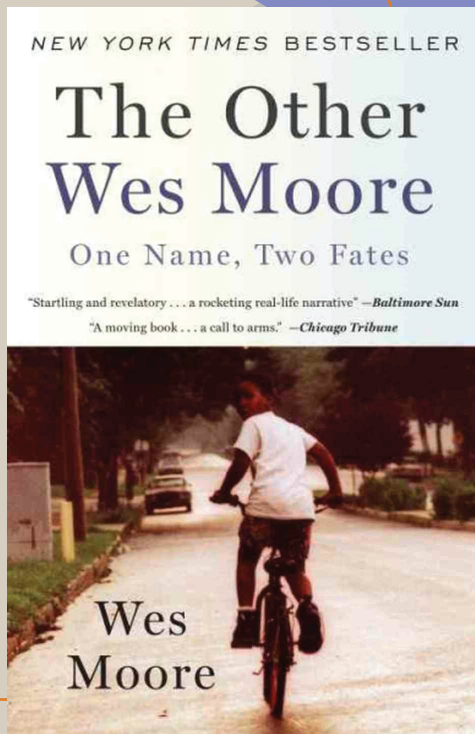
MEZ WOOLFE

RA GUIDE



The chilling truth is that his story could have been mine.

The tragedy is that my story could have been his.





Westley Moore (Author)

Chapter 1

- Westley Moore born 1978
- Mother is angered by Wes' treatment of his sister 1982
- Father passes away from illness

Chapter 2

- Westley and family move in with grandparents in New York 1984
- Makes friends on basketball court

Chapter 3

- Enrolls at private Riverdale Academy 1987
- Mother works multiple jobs to fund school; grandparents care for him
- Placed on academic probation 1989

Chapter 4

- Sister, Shani, gets caught in a fight; Westley defends her 1990
- Arrested for vandalism; is freed inside the cruiser

Chapter 5

- Placed on academic probation again 1991
- Enrolled in military school in Philadelphia
- Grandparents mortgage their home to pay for tuition

Chapter 6

- Promoted to platoon sergeant 1994
- Westley and Dalio are attacked and called racist slurs

Chapter 7

- Becomes Airborne certified 1997
- Decides to stay at Valley Forge for junior college

Chapter 8

- Becomes Rhodes scholar; studies abroad in South Africa 2000
- Studies at Oxford 2001
- 2005-2006: fights in Iraq and Afghanistan 2005
- Accepted into White House Fellow Program 2006

Wesley Moore

Chapter 1

- 1975 Wesley Moore born; father is absent throughout childhood
- 1982 Pell Grants slashed so Wes's Mother drops out college
- Wesley meets his father

Chapter 2

- 1984 Engages in a fight during a football game; is arrested for the first time

Chapter 3

- 1987 Repeats sixth grade
- Enters the drug trade; begins drug use (marijuana)

Chapter 4

- 1990 Family discovers Wesley's drug use and distribution

Chapter 5

- 1991 Wesley and Alicia date; Alicia gives birth to their first child
- Sees his father for the third, and last, time
- Involved in gun fight; arrested for assault & serves 6 months in juvenile detention

Chapter 6

- 1992 Stops attending school
- 1993 Wes and Alicia's second child is born
- 1994 Wesley's friend Woody graduates high school
- Arrested for selling drugs to police

Chapter 7

- 1995 Fathers two more children with Cheryl
- 1997 Cheryl caught high on heroin; Wes joins Job Corp & earns GED
- 1998 Graduates from Job Corps; returns to drug production

Chapter 8

- 2000 Arrested for robbing jeweler & killing off-duty police officer
- Sentenced to life in prison



Facilitator Guide:

1. Have students read the excerpts.
2. Have them read the questions and write down answers to gather their thoughts before sharing with a partner. Or, go around and have one student ask a question and then choose another student to read an answer. Think/pair/share is a good way to structure discussion.
3. Ask follow up questions and allow students to ask follow up questions.

Theme: Fatherhood and Social Class (p. 100-101)

Time: 5-10 mins

The idea of becoming a father depressed Wes, but he wasn't sure why. He didn't have to worry about feeling alone or like a pariah. Wes and Alicia's situation was anything but exceptional. 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. He 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. And he wasn't overly stressed about the responsibilities of fatherhood— he didn't even know what that meant. 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.

A week later, Wes and Tony took their girlfriends to their mother's house to celebrate the first birthday of their baby brother. An ice cream cake with HAPPY 1ST written in icing sat in the middle of the dining room table. Wes and Alicia sat on one side of the table, Tony and his girlfriend on the other. Mary, with her newest son on her lap, sat at the head of the table. When Mary stood to cut the cake, Tony was struck by the absurdity of the scene.

"Ma, isn't it crazy that you just had a baby, and we just had a baby, and there is someone else at the table pregnant—" Tony cut himself off and assumed a surprised expression, as if he couldn't believe he'd let the news slip out.

Wes's eyes shot over to Tony, Alicia's eyes shot over to Wes, Mary's eyes shot over to Alicia. Wes

whined that Tony was ruining what was supposed to be a nice family gathering.

Mary didn't bother with their squabbling— her attention was on Alicia. "Alicia, are you pregnant?" she asked, still standing with a cake knife poised in the air.

Alicia's eyes did not leave Wes as she slowly nodded her head. Mary closed her eyes and took a deep breath. She put down the cake knife and locked her fingers behind her head, then arched her back as if trying to work out some deep tension. After a moment, she brought her arms back to her sides, exhaled, and looked around the table.

"So who wants cake?"

1. Do his personal experiences fit with what you know about parent-child relationships and their effect on a person's social class?
2. How is fatherhood discussed in the book and in this passage in particular? Is it a negative or positive force in a young adult's life?
3. What kind of father-figures have influenced your life?



The People Who Help Us (p. 160-161)

Time: 5-10 mins

A week later, I sat across the table from Paul White, the assistant director of admissions at Johns Hopkins. I was expecting a stodgy, older gentleman who'd offer me canned encomiums about Hopkins and then stiffen and ask for the check when he found out the details of my standardized test scores. What I found was a black man with a warm disposition and a booming voice, who bristled with energy and was constantly in motion, his hands swooping like birds in flight to accentuate his points. I spent much of the lunch telling him my story, and he spent the remaining time selling me on Hopkins. By the end of our meal, I realized that Hopkins represented much more than a chance to attend a great school with a phenomenal reputation. It was also a chance to go home. My relationship with my mother had changed significantly. I'd spent so much of my life running from her, trying to show her I didn't need her as much as she thought. She'd spent much of the same period being an unrelenting disciplinarian. But as I got older, and as she realized her days of hard-core parenting were coming to an end, she became more than a mother, she became a friend.

But there was still the matter of getting in. My SAT scores were hundreds of points below the average for students entering Johns Hopkins, and despite my being a junior college graduate and an Army officer, I knew that landing admission at Hopkins would be a stretch at best. So after filling out the application, I put it out of my mind. But months later, I got the large package in the mail. Not only was I accepted but I would receive scholarship money. I read the letter aloud to my mother over the phone, and she screamed in excitement.

While reading the letter, I thought about Paul White. 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. Many of the kids I grew up with in the Bronx— including guys like Shea, who stayed outside the law— never believed that they'd have a shot. Many in the generation before mine believed that maybe they did, but they had the rug pulled out from under them by cuts in programs like the Pell Grants or by the myriad setbacks that came with the age of crack. Reversals spun them right back to the streets and away from their true ambitions. For the rest of us— those who snuck in despite coming from the margins— the mission has to be to pull up others behind us. That's what Paul White did for me, and it changed my life.

1. Think about the people who have influenced your journey to college. Can you describe that person? How did that person influence you?
2. How does Wes Moore define privilege in this passage? How does it compare or contrast to what you know about privilege?



Economic Mobility (p. 144-145)

Time: 10-15 mins

After seven months, Wes met his graduation from Job Corps with as much trepidation as excitement. No longer would he have to show up at the large parking lot on Sunday evenings waiting for the blue bus. No longer would he have to share a room with Levy who, after a troubled start, was completing his GED requirements and starting his vocational classes. Wes would now be on his own.

Wes's first job was as a landscaper at a home in Baltimore County. It was a temporary gig, and after five months he moved on to rehabbing homes in the city— another temporary job. After that, he worked as a food preparer at a mall in Baltimore. A year after completing the Job Corps training, Wes realized the only consistency in his employment was inconsistency. That, and the fact that none of these jobs paid over nine dollars an hour.

One day, after completing his shift chopping vegetables, Wes took a detour on the way home. He went by his old West Baltimore neighborhood to pick up a package. He had stayed away from these blocks because he had been so busy since getting back from Laurel. He worked ten hours a day and came home with barely enough energy to play with his kids and barely enough money to feed and clothe them. But the main reason he avoided these streets was that he felt they held nothing for him. He had changed. At least he wanted to believe that, and he continued to tell himself that as he walked through the blocks. He raised his head and acknowledged the many faces he had not seen for over a year.

Wes was amazed as he watched how little the game had changed: the corner boys still pulling lookout, the muscle still looking as intimidating as ever. Wes watched as, across the street, a young man no older than sixteen pulled out a wad of cash, held together by a rubber band, and began showing it off to a friend. Lines of heads circled the block looking for their next hit. Some of the players had changed, but the positions were the same.

Wes finally got home and went immediately to his kitchen. He was living on his own now, in a small apartment. He placed the package he'd picked up on

the table, sat down, and put his head in his hands. The pressure was breaking Wes down. Alicia complained that he was not giving her enough money to provide for the kids they shared. Cheryl was now constantly calling him about wanting more time with the kids—which meant she wanted more money to take care of them. His mother needed more money because she was raising both Wes's and Tony's kids. Wes banged his fists against the top of his head as his elbows rested on the kitchen table. 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.

1. Do you think you can change your social class? How does a person change social class?
2. Does this passage about the Other Wes Moore support the idea that changing your social class is easy or difficult?



Expectations and How We Live Up To Them (p. 125-127)

Time: 10-15 mins

I sat again in that large, gray, windowless room with about thirty other people waiting to see their fathers, husbands, sons, boyfriends, and friends. The air in the room was heavy and cold, the chairs hard. There was a vending machine with only a few sad items dangling inside. Small lockers lined the gray walls. We were told to place whatever we carried with us inside them. Nothing unaccounted for could go in— or out of— the secured room that would be our next stop. Out of the thirty people in the room, I was one of only two men. The rest were women and children.

One by one, the guards called out numbers. After about an hour of waiting, I finally heard mine. I quickly rose and walked over to a desk where bulletproof glass separated me from a corrections officer. The officer threw out the same barrage of questions they always ask. “What is your relation to the inmate? Do you have any electronic equipment or sharp items? Do you have any items you plan on passing on to the inmate?” Eventually they let me into the visitors’ room, where I waited for Wes to be escorted in.

“I wasn’t even there that day.”

I looked at Wes, speechless. He still didn’t admit to the armed robbery that had led to his final imprisonment.

There were days when our unexpected relationship started to seem absurd. What was I doing here, anyway? More than three years earlier, I’d written a letter to a stranger whose story had sat with me for years. We shared a name, but the truth was that I didn’t know this man. He was simply an address, a P.O. box, and a personal identification number. A man convicted of murder. And, inevitably, as in every convict cliché I’d ever heard, he claimed innocence.

But I started to think more about his repeated defense, offered again and again in earnest: “I wasn’t even there that day.” Did he think that through repetition it would become true? That if he just incanted the phrase enough the prison walls would collapse and he’d be able to walk back home? Did he think it could reverse time? How far back would he have to go to be innocent again?

Wes folded his hands together; his broad shoulders leaned in. We were nearing the end of our get-together. Silence now overrode the conversation. He smiled.

I decided not to respond directly to this latest protest of his innocence. Instead, I asked a question: “Do you think we’re all just products of our environments?” His 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 others’ expectations that you take on as your own.”

I 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,” 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.”

An hour later, our time was up, and he was escorted out as quickly as he entered. I sat in the room alone, collecting my thoughts. I had more questions than I came in with.

1. What are some of the ways in which others’ expectations of you – how they expect you to act, who they expect you to be – impact how you see yourself?
2. What are some of the ways that others’ expectations start to become your own expectations for yourself? For example, how have others’ expectations influenced your choice of college or major?
3. Why do you think that this process of internalizing others’ expectations occurs?



Education Opportunities and Non-Opportunities (p. 47-54)

Time: 20-25 mins

My mother decided soon after our move to the Bronx that I was not going to public school. She wasn't a snob, she was scared. My mother was a graduate of the public school system in New York herself, and the daughter of a public school teacher in the same system. She knew the public schools in the area. The schools she'd gone to were still there— same names, same buildings— but they were not the same institutions. The buildings themselves were dilapidated— crumbling walls and faded paint— and even if you were one of the lucky 50 percent who made it out in four years, it was not at all clear that you'd be prepared for college or a job. 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.

But no matter how much the world around us seemed ready to crumble, my mother was determined to see us through it. When we moved to New York, she worked multiple jobs, from a freelance writer for magazines and television to a furrier's assistant— whatever she could do to help cover her growing expenses. She had to provide for us, and she was helping out her parents, who were living off two small pensions and their small monthly Social Security check. My mother would wake us up in the morning for school, and before we had even finished getting dressed, she was off to work, leaving my grandparents to get us there. My grandparents would pick us up after school, prepare dinner for the family, and get us to bed. Late into the night, my mother would come in from her last job and walk straight to our bedroom, pull the covers tight around us, and give my sister and me our kiss good night. The smell of her perfume would wake me as soon as she walked in, and then comfort me back to sleep.

My mother first heard about Riverdale Country School when she was a girl growing up in the Bronx. It was the sort of school you might find in a storybook, a fantasy for a public school kid. It sat along the banks of the Hudson River, and the rolling hills and lush quadrangles of its campus gave it the grand appearance of a university. The ivy-covered buildings

were like a promise to its students of what awaited them. It was the school John F. Kennedy attended as a child.

When my mom visited the school again as an adult, she was immediately convinced that this was where she wanted my sister and me to go. Riverdale was in the Bronx but was its own little island of affluence, a fact local residents were quick to remind you of in hopes of keeping their property values from collapsing to the level of the rest of the borough. My mother saw Riverdale as a haven, a place where I could escape my neighborhood and open my horizons. But for me, it was where I got lost.

Justin and I got off the subway— covered with graffiti tags and all-city murals— at Gun Hill Road and began the ten-minute walk home. Everything about the Bronx was different from downtown Manhattan, more intense and potent; even the name of the street we walked down— Gun Hill Road— suggested blood sport. As soon as we hit the Bronx bricks, our senses were assaulted. 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.

On the way to my house, we decided to stop by Ozzie's to see if our crew was around. Ozzie was our boy, tall and dark-skinned, with a close-cropped Caesar and a soft Caribbean accent like his father's. His basketball skills transcended his years; he was only in fifth grade when high schools started to recruit him. As expected, there they were— our little crew, sprawled along the white stone steps of Ozzie's house. Before I could properly get into the flow of conversation, Paris

turned to me.

“How y’all like it up there at that white school?”

Paris was a good-looking guy with a brilliant smile that he rarely cared to share. He leaned back as he spoke— his question was a challenge.

“It’s cool, it’s whatever,” I quietly replied, looking down at the ground. It was a sore spot. In the hood, your school affiliation was essential. Even if you weren’t running with the coolest clique, you still got some percentage of your rep from your school, and the name Riverdale wasn’t going to impress anyone. If anything, it made my crew kind of suspicious of me. So I quickly changed the subject.

“What’s up with the Knicks this year?”

Lame, I know, but I was desperate. Most of my neighborhood friends were attending public schools in the area; a few were attending Catholic school. But Justin and I were the only two who actually went all the way across town to attend a predominantly white private school. It would take as long as an hour and a half some days, depending on traffic, stalled trains, weather, and other factors, but we would make it there. And on time. At least initially.

“Nah, for real, what’s up with Riverdale?”

Paris asked, bringing the topic back. His voice rose on the last word, as he made his best attempt at a proper British accent. I had to admit that Riverdale sounded a little like something out of Archie Comics. It was embarrassing. I decided to try a different tack. “Yeah, it’s cool, man, nobody messes with me over there. I have the place on lock,” I started, unconvincingly. My feet shuffled and my voice lowered a few octaves. I caught Justin out of the side of my eye, shaking his head with amazement at the nonsense that was coming out of my mouth. I could feel the burn of his skeptical stare on the side of my face, but I pressed on.

“Let me tell you how I run things up there,”

I said and launched into the story of my recent suspension from school.

A few weeks earlier I had been suspended for fighting. I was playfully wrestling with a kid from my grade when I decided to go for a killer move: I grabbed his right arm with mine and hoisted him over my shoulder, then dropped him hard on the ground. The fall was awkward, and he landed on his head, opening a small but surprisingly bloody cut. After the boy was rushed to the school nurse and eventually to the hospital to get a few stitches, I was suspended for fighting.

That was the truth.

For my friends, I decided to juice the story up a little. Or a lot. The story I told had the boy disrespecting me and me getting in his face to respond. When he kept jawing, I picked him up over my head

and slammed him to the ground. Then I stood over his bleeding body, taunting him like Muhammad Ali over Sonny Liston, daring him to get back up.

My friends looked over at Justin, who had a pained expression on his face. He knew the truth, and soon the rest of my friends did too. I became the butt of pretty unrelenting taunting. My attempt at creating a Wes Moore legend had backfired.

I was saved after about twenty minutes when a man stumbled toward us. His hair looked like it hadn’t seen a comb in weeks. There were laces in only one of his filthy sneakers.

“Can you young brothers spare some change? I need to make a phone call,” he stuttered. An old and unpleasant odor preceded him.

Ozzie responded first, his Jamaican accent a little thicker than usual. “Get the hell out of here, man. Nobody has any change for you.”

The man slowly moved away, peeking backward a couple times, hoping one of us would overrule Ozzie’s rejection.

Ozzie shook his head in disbelief. “If dude wanted to buy some rock, he should have just said it. Who the hell was he gonna call if we gave him some change?” We all laughed as the panhandler staggered back up the block to look for sympathy elsewhere.

Drugs were not new to the Bronx. Marijuana, cocaine, and heroin all took their turns as the drug of choice. But crack was different. After it officially introduced itself in the early 1980s, it didn’t take long for crack to place a stranglehold on many communities. The Bronx was one of them. I was an eyewitness.

Crack was different from the drugs that preceded it. It was crazily accessible and insanely potent— and addictive. My friends and I would regularly trade the most remarkable stories we’d overheard or witnessed: A father who left his family and robbed his parents for money to buy rock. A pregnant mother who sold her body to get another hit. Someone’s grandmother who blew her monthly Social Security check on crack.

The other difference between crack and other drugs was its method of distribution. There was so much money to be made that drug gangs rapidly expanded their ranks, sucking in some of our best friends, and turf wars became deadly, aided by the influx of sophisticated firearms. The mayhem spread from the gangs to the rest of the neighborhood. Everyone felt threatened. Everyone was defensive. From the early 1980s to the end of the decade, there was an almost 61 percent jump in the murder rate. When I look back now, it’s almost surreal. In 2008, there were 417 homicides in New York City. In 1990, there were 2,605. Those murders were concentrated

in a handful of neighborhoods, and the victims were concentrated in a single demographic: young black men. In some neighborhoods, the young men would've been safer living in war zones. We laughed at the panhandler on the block, but he wasn't just an object of ridicule, he was an unsettling omen.

END HERE – if room, keep going

After sitting with the crew for a few hours, Justin and I decided to get back to the subway station so he could head home. The sun was beginning to set, so we knew we didn't have much time. We didn't need to check our watches— we were starting to feel the fear that crept around the edges of our consciousness at dusk. Justin lived a few train stops away from me, and taking the train home after dark was a different journey than the one we'd made earlier in the day. Justin knew the rules: Never look people in the eye. Don't smile, it makes you look weak. If someone yells for you, particularly after dark, just keep walking. Always keep your money in your front pocket, never in your back pocket. Know where the drug dealers and smokers are at all times. Know where the cops are at all times. And if night fell too soon and Justin was forced to go home by foot over the Bruckner Expressway overpass in the dark, he knew to run all the way.

We increased our pace; neither of our mothers would condone us coming home late. His mother and mine were kindred spirits. Both were born in 1950, both nicknamed their oldest children Nikki after Nikki Giovanni, both knew all about the public schools in the Bronx (my mother went to school in them and Justin's mother taught in them), and both were single mothers working multiple jobs to send their kids to a school outside their neighborhoods. Justin's mother looked after me like I was one of her own. The same way my mother did for Justin.

The sun continued its rapid descent. We tried to keep a bop in our step, tried to keep it cool, but by now we were pretty explicitly speedwalking. Breathing a little heavily, we did our best to keep up appearances. We laughed about our day, talked about school.

Riverdale. The pristine campus and well-dressed kids had stunned me on my first visit— the Bronx was not the homogenous ghetto I thought it was. I felt a crazy-making crosscurrent of emotions whenever I stepped onto campus. Every time I looked around at the buildings and the trees and the view of the river, I was reminded of the sacrifices my mother was making to keep me there. And every time I looked at my fellow students, I was reminded of how little I fit in.

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. Later I even borrowed Nikki's clothes to show some further variation, thinking that nobody would notice the zippers at the bottoms of the jeans or the way the hips hugged a little tight. I would just nonchalantly say that I was trying to "bring the seventies back." This claim was usually met with polite smiles when I was in the room, but I can only imagine the hysterical laughter and conversations about my cross-dressing when I wasn't around.







When the kids would talk about the new videogame system that was out or how their family was going to Greece or Spain or France during summer vacation, I would sit silent, hoping they wouldn't ask me where my family planned on "summering." At times I would try to join in, chiming in about the "vacation home" my family had in Brooklyn, not realizing how ridiculous I sounded. The "vacation home" I was speaking about was the parsonage my grandparents had moved into when my grandfather came out of retirement to lead a congregation. Not until I got older did I learn that Flatbush Avenue inspired a lower level of awe than the French Riviera. Whenever I hung out with Riverdale kids, I made sure we went to their homes, not mine. I didn't want to have to explain. But, in the sixth grade, I broke my own rule.

My uncle Howard was my mother's younger brother. He had recently made a decision with his medical school that becoming a doctor was not in the cards for him, and he moved to the Bronx, where he worked as a pharmaceutical salesman. He came up with the idea to invite some kids from the neighborhood to play a game of baseball with the kids from my school in a park near our house. I think he sensed my frustration at living in mutually exclusive worlds and thought a game of baseball would bring together my neighborhood friends and my wealthier Riverdale classmates and broaden the horizons of both. His intentions were good. I jumped at the idea. I invited ten friends from school to come and play against my friends from the neighborhood.

In the first inning, my neighborhood friend Deshawn, who was playing first base, started trash-talking Randy, a lanky Riverdale kid with a mop haircut, after Randy hit a single. Innocent stuff— until Deshawn finally said one thing too many and Randy, the pride of super-affluent Scarsdale, playfully tipped the front bill of Deshawn's hat, knocking it off his head. It was as if he were a king and someone had knocked his crown into the dirt. Before we were even

fifteen minutes into the game, a brawl had broken out. Three fights and four innings later, I conceded that the experiment wasn't working out. The game was called. Everyone retreated to their separate corners, to their separate worlds. Everyone except me, still caught in the middle.

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. My confidence took a hit. Unlike Justin, whose maturity helped him handle this transition much better than I did, I began to let my grades slip. Disappointed with Ds, pleasantly satisfied with Cs, and celebratory about a B, I allowed my standards at school to become pathetic. In third grade I was reading at a second-grade reading level. 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. Considering my performance in the classroom thus far, I was well on my way to needing state-sponsored accommodations.

-  1. What does your education mean to you? Is it the means to a specific job? Are you here to learn broad skills that can be applied to many different jobs?
-  2. What choices have you made to help or hurt your education?
-  3. What are some examples of how education influenced Wes Moore and the Other Wes Moore's life decisions?
-  4. Did you have access to good schools? What were the facilities like? Did your family have to make sacrifices or move so you could have a better education?
-  5. On p. 54, Moore connected third grade reading levels with incarceration rates. How does education affect crime in your own neighborhoods? Did your high school have a high or low drop out rate?
-  6. How did your educational environment affect your own choices about your education?