

Bad Boy: A Memoir

Walter Dean Myers

Amistad Books for Young Readers, 2002

Reviews

- School Library Journal (May 2001): “This superb memoir begins simply with an account of Myers’s family history and his boyhood. Vivid detail makes the Harlem of the ’40s come alive, from the music and children’s games to the everyday struggle for survival. As Myers grows older, however, his story also grows in complexity. Soon readers are caught up in his turbulent adolescence and his slow, painful development as a writer. Even while performing poorly in school, the teen endlessly devoured great works of literature, often in secret. He also wrote, sometimes quitting out of discouragement but always beginning again. Eventually he attended school less and less often, sometimes fighting roaming gang members or delivering “packages” for drug dealers. After dropping out of high school, he enlisted in the army. Sadness and bewilderment infuse these last chapters as Myers faces a bleak future. Intellectually, he’s left his family and friends far behind, but his race and circumstances seem to give him few choices. After years of menial jobs, Myers remembered a teacher’s advice—“Whatever you do, don’t stop writing”—and in time his persistence paid off. This memoir is never preachy; instead, it is a story full of funny anecdotes, lofty ideals, and tender moments. The author’s growing awareness of racism and of his own identity as a black man make up one of the most interesting threads. Young writers will find inspiration here, while others may read the book as a straightforward account of a colorful, unforgettable childhood.” (Not archived online, retrieved via Ebsco).
- School Library Journal (Nov. 2004): “Myers’s youthful misadventures speak humorously and seriously to a mass of contradictions: a love and affinity for language hampered first by an early speech impediment, and later, by sporting a too-cool armor within a tough Harlem neighborhood. A candid story about being blessed with gifts, rocked by self-doubt, and cursed with attitude, this funny and honest memoir is written with poignant literary flare.” (Not archived online, retrieved via Ebsco).
- School Library Journal (Nov. 2003): “Myers’s frank memoir depicts both the early security he felt with his adoptive family in Harlem, and his confusing teen years when the academically and athletically gifted young man was prone to violent outbursts. Readers will relate to his struggle to find his place in the world as he discovered the racial divide in America that affected his choice of friends, jobs, and future plans. Although he often neglected school, Myers loved to read, and he recalls many of the books that sustained him through difficult times.” (Not archived online, retrieved via Ebsco).
- [Publishers Weekly](#) (May 1, 2001): “Myers paints a fascinating picture of his childhood growing up in Harlem in the 1940s, with an adult’s benefit of hindsight. [...] Throughout the volume, Myers candidly examines the complexities of being black in America, from his first exposure to slavery in a seventh grade American history class, to the painful realization in adolescence that his blond, blue-eyed best friend is invited to parties where Walter is not welcome. [...] What emerges is a

clear sense of how one young man's gifts separate him from his peers, causing him to stir up trouble in order to belong. Fortunately, this bad boy turned out to be a fine writer.”

- [Kirkus](#) (Mar. 14, 2001): “[P]aints a picture of a boy in love with words, an avid reader, and later an enthusiastic writer, but also one whose quick, violent temper kept him in constant trouble. From a cozy childhood in the embrace of his foster parents to an alienated and depressed adolescence, Myers consciously sets out to identify those elements that made him what he is: a black writer of books for all children. One of the book’s strengths, no surprise, is its careful and loving depiction of Harlem’s black community, and readers familiar with Myers’s other work will recognize in many of the figures and situations he describes the inspirations for his fiction. Another is Myers’s wry commentary on his youthful actions and attitudes... this glimpse into his own childhood is wonderfully valuable, fascinating, and even inspiring.”

Awards

- None found

Lists

- [ALA/YALSA Best Books for Young Adults](#), 2002
- [Cooperative Children’s Book Center Choices](#), 2002

Response to Challenges

- Retained in Duval County, FL as assigned sixth grade reading, with the addition of a warning about language (a homophobic slur and the word “penis”). No formal statement on the book found. ([Orlando Sentinel](#), 2017)

References

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