

“The Crossover”

Discussion Questions

1. Josh has many identities in this book--son, brother, basketball player, poet, and friend. At times he likes his nickname “Filthy McNasty,” but at other times he wants to be called “Josh.” How is Josh different from “Filthy McNasty”? Is either personality dominant?
2. Mr. Bell’s advice to his sons comes through in several places, but particularly in all of the Basketball Rules. How do the rules connect to the characters in the book? How do they connect to your family?
3. Teens are often accused of caring only for themselves. How does Josh both fit and go against that stereotype? In what ways are teenagers and their worlds more complex than adults give them credit for?
4. How does each parent shape Josh’s values, concerns, interests, etc.? How does his brother?
5. In thinking of siblings or even good friends, how do brothers and sisters (or friends) both challenge us to be more than we are and also keep us in our place?
6. How does Mr. Bell’s health struggle affect the family in both direct and subtle ways?
7. How do extracurricular/outside of school activities create possibilities for growth as well as challenges we must learn to overcome? How do these areas of growth and challenge affect the characters in the book?
8. Josh encounters many types of loss throughout the book, and in the final section, “Overtime,” Josh struggles with his most painful loss. How does he process the conflicting emotions that come with each loss?
9. Kwame Alexander said the following in an interview with ESPN’s TrueHoop TV: “The idea is that you want to win but you want to do it in such a beautiful way. You don’t just want to win. You want to win with wit, with cleverness, with magic. . . . That energy is such an important part of basketball, that SWISH, that DRIZZLE, that CROSSOVER.” Some people might initially label this as a sports book, but the book goes beyond that label. How is this book about much more than basketball? How does the book also connect to the beauty, wit, swish, and drizzle of life?
10. Kwame Alexander writes the novel in verse. How does using poetry--many different kinds of poetry--affect the story and its readers?
11. Vocabulary poems appear throughout the book. How do these reinforce significant moments in the book? How do the rules apply to life?

12. The book includes many references to jazz and hip hop. How does bringing in the different types of music add to the story and the characters?

13. The book presents an opportunity to consider forgiveness and the righting of wrongs with siblings, parents, friends, and perhaps more difficult, ourselves. What are the challenges and benefits in doing so?