

Analyzing the Literature

Provided below are discussion questions you can use in small groups, with the whole class, or for written assignments. Each question is given at two levels so you can choose the right question for each group of students. Activity sheets with these questions are provided (pages 18–19) if you want students to write their responses. For each question, a few key discussion points are provided for your reference.

| Story Element | ■ Level 1 | ▲ Level 2 | Key Discussion Points |
|---------------|---|--|--|
| Character | Describe the twins and their family. | How are Josh and Jordan Bell similar? How are they different? | Jordan and Josh both play basketball for their school team. Josh plays the forward position and has long dreadlocks. Jordan, also called JB, is a guard and keeps his hair cut short. Jordan is a huge Michal Jordan fan and likes to bet on just about anything. Josh mostly focuses on basketball. |
| Plot | Why does Chuck Bell nickname Josh <i>Filthy McNasty</i> ? | What do you learn about Josh and his father based on the day Chuck nicknames Josh? | Josh and his dad are listening to jazz music together, and Horace Silver's song "Filthy McNasty" comes on. Chuck dedicates the song to his son because it's the "best song, the funkier song" on the album. This scene illustrates how the father and son use humor and common interests to communicate and get along. |
| Character | Describe the relationship between Josh and his father. | How can you tell that Josh admires his father? | Josh and his father have a loving relationship. They joke around a lot and spend time together. While Josh thinks that some of the things his father does are outdated, he likes being around his dad and hearing his jokes. |
| Setting | How are the poems about basketball different from the other poems in the first section? | Why did Kwame Alexander write "Dribbling" the way he did? What connections can be made between the setting and the poem's structure? | The poem "Dribbling" is written to elicit movement and describe what is happening on the court in the middle of a basketball game. During a game, movement is swift and rapid and Alexander captures this movement by writing the poem visually. |

Name _____

Date _____



Creating with the Story Elements

Directions: Thinking about the story elements of character, setting, and plot in a novel is very important to understanding what is happening and why. Complete **one** of the following activities based on what you've read so far. Be creative and have fun!

Characters

Josh loves his locked hair.
Write a rhyme, poem, or
rap pretending you are
Josh explaining how much
your locks mean to you.

Setting

Based on what you know
about Jordan and Josh,
create a sketch of how their
rooms might look. Make
sure to include their likes,
interests, and hobbies.

Plot

Think about the types of lessons that Jordan and Josh receive from their parents. How might an ex-professional athlete and an assistant school principal relate differently to the twins? Create a Venn diagram to show the differences between how the parents treat their children.

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| Story Element | ■ Level 1 | ▲ Level 2 | Key Discussion Points |
|---------------|--|---|---|
| Character | Describe Chuck and Dr. Bell. | How might you describe the relationship between the twins and their parents? | Chuck and Dr. Bell are Josh and Jordan's parents. Both parents clearly love and care for the boys, but Chuck likes to joke where Dr. Bell is considered the sterner parent. |
| Plot | Why did JB give up extra summer basketball practice to go to Sunday school, and what does Josh think about this? | How might JB choosing girls over basketball be foreshadowing for something else to come? What do you think this means for the boys' relationship? | This is the first time in the book (and maybe their lives) where the boys have a very different opinion on things. Usually, they are very focused on basketball. Recently, though, JB has taken an interest in girls and has put basketball aside. This might cause a rift between the boys since Josh thinks focusing on girls over basketball is crazy! |
| Character | How do Chuck and Dr. Bell differ in their eating habits? | Why do you think Dr. Bell is concerned about what the family eats? | Chuck Bell is prone to hypertension and had to leave professional basketball because of a muscle condition. Dr. Bell is worried that he is not taking care of himself, and they argue about this matter a lot. Chuck often sneaks off to eat unhealthy food with the twins, and Dr. Bell tries to balance that out by monitoring what they eat together. |
| Plot | Who is the new girl? | How do the boys react to the new girl? | There is a new girl at the school. She is initially described only by what she is wearing (tight jeans and pink sneakers). Both boys are instantly interested in her—JB outwardly and Josh secretly. She initially talks to Josh, but then comes to the basketball game with a drink for JB. |

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Characters

Make up clever nicknames for Vondie, Dr. Bell, and the coach. Explain why you gave them these names.

Setting

In "Gym class," Josh has many thoughts running through his head. Sketch Josh and draw 3–4 thought bubbles to illustrate some of the things he is thinking about.

Plot

When the new girl walks up to Josh at the end of the game, he thinks she is there to see him. Pretend you are Josh, and write a poem about how you feel at the moment you realize she is waiting for your brother.

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| Story Element | ■ Level 1 | ▲ Level 2 | Key Discussion Points |
|---------------|---|--|--|
| Character | How does Josh describe the changes in his brother to his father? | What does Josh feel about how JB is acting now that he's interested in Alexis? | Josh complains to his father that Jordan is acting strangely. He notes that Jordan is always smiling, getting spacey, wearing cologne, and texting Alexis. Josh begs his father to help him get Jordan back to normal. |
| Plot | Why is Dr. Bell trying to get the family to eat differently? | For what reasons does Dr. Bell have concerns about her family's eating habits? | Dr. Bell knows that Chuck should go to the doctor to be checked out, and this point is the main cause of conflict between the parents. Chuck's father had a stroke, and Chuck has recently had a few issues with his health in front of the boys. She has valid cause for her concern. |
| Character | How has the twins' relationship changed since the beginning of the book? | What do you think is causing the twins' relationship to change? | Most of the tension arises from Jordan's girlfriend, Alexis, but some of it is because Josh feels abandoned by his brother. Earlier in the book, it states that Jordan skipped summer basketball camp to spend time with a girl. So the change has been coming for a while now. |
| Plot | What happens between JB and Jordan during the game at the end of the section? | What incidents lead up to Josh's explosion at the end of this section? | Josh finally hits his tipping point during the middle of the game. The stress of JB's relationship, being late to the game, and getting caught up in the moment are too much for Josh. He explodes and fires the ball right at his brother's face. |

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Second Quarter

Creating with the Story Elements

Directions: Thinking about the story elements of character, setting, and plot in a novel is very important to understanding what is happening and why. Complete **one** of the following activities based on what you've read so far. Be creative and have fun!

Characters

Create a Venn diagram for Josh. On one side, list all of the positive qualities of his personality. On the other side, list the negative qualities of his personality. In the middle, include attributes that both help and hurt the other characters in the story.

Setting

At this point, the book has taken place in several locations. Draw a map of the Bells' community. Make sure to include the school, their house, the restaurants they visit, the recreation center, the library, and other places important to the plot of the novel.

Plot

The story is told from Josh's point of view. Write a description of how the story would be different if it were told from JB's point of view.

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| Story Element | ■ Level 1 | ▲ Level 2 | Key Discussion Points |
|---------------|---|---|---|
| Plot | What are the indicators that Chuck has serious health issues? | Chuck is clearly ill, why doesn't he go to the doctor now? | Chuck doesn't like going to the doctor because his father went for a check up and died in the hospital. These spells (nose bleed, vomiting, etc.) are probably not good indications of his health. |
| Plot | Tension is rising between Chuck and Dr. Bell. What is causing this tension? | What are some ways Chuck and Dr. Bell could fix the issues they have been arguing about? | Things between Chuck and Dr. Bell are tense because Chuck is sick and refuses to go to the doctor. Dr. Bell would like him to get a check up as well as cut back on unhealthy eating. She thinks these will help him be healthier. |
| Character | What do you think it will take for JB to forgive his brother? | For what reasons does Josh blame JB for their feud? | The twins are at an impasse, but with time JB should be able to forgive his brother. The brothers are at odds because Josh feels abandoned. He doesn't have a girlfriend, has no one to play basketball with, and his parents seem to be preoccupied. He feels alone and blames JB. |
| Character | Describe what we learn about Alexis in this section. | In what ways could learning more about Alexis help and/or harm the relationship between the brothers? | Alexis plays basketball at the Rec center. She follows the WNBA as well as the NBA. Her parents are divorced, and she lives with her father. Her sister goes to Duke. Learning about her might be helpful because Josh will see why JB likes her. It could be harmful because Josh might still feel he has been replaced. |

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Third Quarter

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Directions: Thinking about the story elements of character, setting, and plot in a novel is very important to understanding what is happening and why. Complete **one** of the following activities based on what you've read so far. Be creative and have fun!

Characters

Create a cause-and-effect chart showing at least four events from the story that lead to Chuck Bell collapsing while playing basketball with Josh.

Setting

Make a poster explaining the importance of health and CPR training in school physical education classes. Add images and words to create a poster that has a strong impact on everyone who sees it.

Plot

Write a poem predicting what you think will happen to the Bell family next. How will the twins respond to the collapse of their father? How will Dr. Bell deal with what comes next?

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| Story Element | ■ Level 1 | ▲ Level 2 | Key Discussion Points |
|---------------|--|---|---|
| Character | Why is Josh initially upset to be at the hospital with his dad? | Describe Josh's feelings about being at the hospital with his dad. How do his feelings change during this time? | Josh would rather be at the game. He was suspended from the last few games, and now that he has been reinstated, he would rather be playing with his team than at the hospital with his dad. Most likely, his frustration is misdirected, and he is scared to be in the hospital. |
| Setting | What do Josh and his father discuss in the hospital? | How do you think the "question" conversation with his father affects Josh? | Josh and his father aren't sure what to say to one another, so they have a "question" conversation. In that conversation, a lot of important information is shared. Josh wants to know why Chuck didn't go to the doctor sooner and if he is going to die. The conversation ends with Josh still being hurt and confused. |
| Plot | How does each boy deal with the illness and death of his father? | How does Chuck's death affect the relationship between the twins? | Each boy expresses his fear and pain differently. Josh wants to pretend everything is fine and continues playing basketball to honor his father. Jordan goes to the hospital and can't keep acting normal. The death of their father seems to bring the boys closer in the end. |
| Character | Why does Chuck give his championship ring to Josh? | How do you think JB feels as he hands their dad's championship ring to Josh? | Chuck understands what makes each of his boys successful. Josh needs basketball. He needs crossovers and dunks. JB needs relationships. He needs his friends, girlfriend, mother, and brother. To make both boys happy, Chuck passes along his legacy knowing they'll find each other again. |

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Characters

Haiku are short poems of three lines. The syllable counts of each line are 5/7/5. Write a series of haiku poems as if you are one of the twins communicating with a friend about how you feel after your father's death.

Setting

Draw a picture that shows the final second during the championship game. Be sure to include the basket, the ball, Josh, JB, and Alexis in your image.

Plot

In this last section, Josh goes to the game and Jordan goes to the hospital to be with their father. How would the end of the book have changed if both boys had gone to the hospital or if both boys had gone to the game? Outline a new story detailing how the plot would have changed, where the story would have gone, and how would it have ended.