

## ***Bridges* by Walter Dean Myers – Questions**

Be prepared to share some information about Walter Dean Myers ([www.walterdeanmyers.net](http://www.walterdeanmyers.net)). He also has a son, Christopher Myers, who is an author and accomplished illustrator.

If necessary, preview the following words: irascible, prism (p. 31/paragraph 2);

imprinted (p. 32/paragraph 2); inducements (p. 32/paragraph 6); voraciously (p. 33/paragraph 3)

Decide whether you'd like to read the whole story first and then work through the questions or read the story by paragraphs and discuss the questions.

Read the **Introduction** aloud

*(There are dreams . . . .)*

1. Do you agree that “what we know of others are gathered memories, collages of events that live within us”? Why or why not? What dreams do you cling to? Where do dreams come from?

2. WDM describes his adoptive parents as “bridges”. What do you think he means?

3. **p. 31, paragraph 1** “What I have known of these people, who I remember them to be, has changed over the years . . . .” Why would the passage of time have changed what WDM knows of his parents?

4. **p. 31, paragraph 2** Why was the silence in the car heavy with grief? Why do you think that women tend to do more care-taking than men? What do you learn about WDM’s wife in this paragraph? Why does WDM curse the disease that has consumed his dad’s strength? Is this cursing a natural reaction?

5. **p. 32, paragraph 1** What do you think WDM meant when he said his “father was an easy man to understand? Why would hard times have been normal for blacks in Baltimore in the early 1900s? Was slavery part of WDM’s father’s family?

6. **p. 32, paragraph 2** What philosophy of life did WDM’s father live by? How did he come to his beliefs? Do you agree with all or parts of this philosophy of life? Why or why not?

7. **p. 32, paragraph 3** What were some of the results of his father being a no-nonsense man?

8. **p. 32, paragraph 4** What do we learn about WDM’s adoptive mother? What did Florence and WDM’s father have in common? What are the realities of being poor in America?

9. **p. 32, paragraph 5** Why do you think that WDM’s parents moved to New York City? Had you ever heard of Fats Waller and/or Bojangles? (Share some information about both and use the clips on Youtube if you’d like.)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PSNPpssruFY>

- **Fats Waller**

Jazz Pianist

- Thomas Wright "Fats" Waller was an influential jazz pianist, organist, composer, singer, and comedic entertainer, whose innovations to the Harlem stride style laid the groundwork for modern jazz piano,

... Wikipedia

**Born:** May 21, 1904, [New York City, NY](#)

**Died:** December 15, 1943, [Kansas City, KS](#)

**Last album:** [Complete Recorded Works, Volume 5](#)

**Albums:** [If You Got to Ask, You Ain't Got It!](#), [The Joint Is Jumpin'](#), [More](#)

**Parents:** [Adeline Locket Waller](#), [Edward Martin Waller](#)

- **Songs**

[Ain't Misbehavin'](#)

[Spring Cleaning](#)

[Your Feet's Too Big](#)

[I'm Gonna Sit Right Down and Write Myself a Letter](#)

[The Joint Is Jumpin'](#)

## **Bill “Bojangles” Robinson**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a8JUwdziLGO>

**Bill "Bojangles" Robinson** (May 25, 1878 – November 25, 1949) was an American [tap dancer](#) and actor of stage and film. Audiences enjoyed his understated style, which eschewed the frenetic manner of the [jitterbug](#) in favor of cool and reserve; rarely did he use his upper body, relying instead on busy, inventive feet, and an expressive face.

A figure in both the black and white entertainment worlds of his era, he is best known today for his dancing with [Shirley Temple](#) in a series of films during the 1930s, and for starring in the musical [Stormy Weather](#) (1943), loosely based on Robinson's own life.

10. **p. 32, paragraph 6** “In my family there were no psychological inducements to behave properly. There were simple standards . . . .” What do you think of the standards that his parents used to raise him? Do you identify with any of these standards, or do they sound familiar?

11. **p. 33, paragraph 1&2** What do we learn about WDM’s mother in this paragraph? What behavior of his mother meant a lot to him? By what age had WDM learned to read? Why do you think he learned to read at such an early age?

12. **p. 32, paragraph 3** Why do you think WDM became a voracious or greedy reader?

13. **p. 33, paragraph 4** What kinds of opportunities, learnings, and new problems did WDM encounter in high school? When children become teen-agers what kind of changes begin to happen?

14. **p. 33, paragraph 5** In this paragraph, WDM writes about finding a different identity. What is he talking about in particular? He writes that he had unconsciously accepted the notion

of “black inferiority”. What does that mean? Why was he crushed to discover that he couldn’t go to college?

15. **p. 33, paragraph 6** Why did WDM drop out of high school? What is “teenaged angst”? What did WDM mean when he said, “I dropped out of my father’s world.”?

16. **p. 34, paragraph 1** In Walter’s mid-20s, what was his relationship like with his father? Why do you think Walter still felt distant from his father despite the fact that his writings started to get published?

17. **p. 34, paragraph 2, 3, 4** What heaviness weighs on Walter as his father’s health continues to deteriorate?

18. **p. 34, paragraph 5&6** What does Walter discover when he goes through his father’s papers after his death? What conflict does this knowledge resolve within Walter? Have you ever yearned for someone blessing or approval?

19. **p. 34, paragraph 7** Walter writes about his father’s storytelling. What has been the impact of that storytelling on Walter’s life?

20. **p. 35, paragraph 1** Walter returns to the theme of his parents as bridges. How have they been bridges for him? What people have been bridges in your life, taking you to the shores that they couldn’t cross?

21. **p. 35, paragraph 2** What would Walter have done if he had known his father couldn’t read?

22. **p. 35, paragraph 3&4** How do you know that Walter is thankful for what his parents did and what they passed onto him? What is one of the nicest things that someone has said to you?

**Note:** Bridges would pair well with the poem *Those Winter Sundays* by Robert Hayden

## **Those Winter Sundays**

Sundays too my father got up early  
And put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,  
then with cracked hands that ached  
from labor in the weekday weather made  
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

I’d wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.  
When the rooms were warm, he’d call,  
and slowly I would rise and dress,  
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

Speaking indifferently to him,  
who had driven out the cold  
and polished my good shoes as well.

What did I know, what did I know  
of love's austere and lonely offices?

Robert Hayden