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Monster LENS

Reader Response

Steve, the main character in *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers, has to undergo an ordeal that many people cannot even fathom. The fact that the other characters were so willing to prosecute him even without any evidence on the table sends a serious message about racial profiling and prejudice. In my own life I have felt prejudice from others but it was more in the realm of sexism that racial stereotyping. In high school I was on my school’s drumline and I was the only girl who had ever been selected to play the quads. The upper classmen did not approve and let their disapproval be known by me and by anyone else who would listen. They began to bully me and tried their hardest to get me to quit. But I never did. A difference between me and Steve is that I never let them influence how I see myself.

But this experience that I had is nothing compared to the experience that Steve undergoes in the novel. He experiences this prejudice without any evidence, without a confession, and without witnesses besides the other people accused. Even with all this evidence pointing to an innocent verdict, Steve still has to endure the distance between himself and the other characters that is created by their doubt. The prosecutor does not use any evidence to convict him but plays on other people’s prejudices and says that he must be a “monster” simply for being him.

I think many young adults would relate to this book even if they never experience something even remotely similar to Steve’s experience. Steve grows up a lot because of this experience and the young adults who are growing and changing while reading this story will be able to identify with Steve. Maybe they are feeling lost and confused as well. Maybe they are not sure who they are either. Maybe they actually have had an experience where they themselves have been stereotyped and judged. I think the book raises an important issue about how we see other people and also has a lot of ideas that young adolescents can identify with.

The text itself, especially the parts where the story takes place in Steve’s head, is very powerful. The passage at the very beginning where Steve explains a little of his situation and introduces the method he’s going to use to tell the story is the perfect way to set up the story. It introduces the protagonist without really telling anything about the character of him. He leaves us with description of his circumstances and the word “monster” that he is now known as. This lack of information almost leaves the story up to the reader to decide who he is exactly and it only in little snippets later that we get more insight into what he is actually thinking. This method is effective at letting the student examine the overall situation and not just see the events from Steve’s point of reference. At the same time it does not divorce you from feeling and relating to Steve himself and makes the book enjoyable for kids during their adolescence.