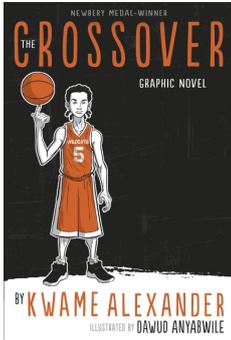




# Walker Books Classroom Ideas



## The Crossover

Kwame Alexander  
illus. by Dawud Anyabwile

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\*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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## Outline:

'With a bolt of lightning on my kicks . . . The court is SIZZLING. My sweat is DRIZZLING. Stop all that quivering. 'Cuz tonight I'm delivering,' raps twelve-year-old Josh Bell. Thanks to their dad, he and his twin brother, Jordan, are kings on the court. But Josh has more than basketball in his blood – he's got mad beats, too, which help him find his rhythm when it's all on the line.

See the Bell family in a whole new light through Dawud Anyabwile's dynamic illustrations as the brothers' winning season unfolds, and the world as they know it begins to change.

## Author/Illustrator Information:

Kwame Alexander is a poet, educator, and the New York Times bestselling author of 28+ books, including *The Undeclared*, *Booked* and *Rebound*, the follow-up to his Newbery medal-winning middle grade novel, *The Crossover*. He's also the Founding Editor of Versify, an imprint that publishes fiction and poetry for children and young adults.

Dawud Anyabwile is an Emmy award-winning artist, illustrator and co-creator of the comic book series, *Brotherman: Dictator of Discipline*. He has worked for Cartoon Network and Nickelodeon as a character designer and storyboard artist, and as an illustrator for several publishers. When Dawud is not working on his illustrations, he is busy volunteering and teaching art classes.

## How to Use These Notes:

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

### These notes are for:

- Secondary 7-9
- Ages 12+

### Key Learning Areas:

- English

### Example of:

- Graphic Novel

### Themes/Ideas:

- Family
- Sports
- Loss
- Poetry



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## Discussion Questions and Activities:

### Before Reading

Ask the students what they might know about basketball (key terms, rules, players, etc) and create a mind-map. You can revisit this after finishing *The Crossover*, and see if students have new information to add.

### Exploring the Text

What are some of the themes in this novel? As a class or in small groups identify and list the themes. Individually write a statement of belief about each theme.

Discuss the title of the book. Do you think this is a good title? Why or why not? How does the concept of a 'crossover' become crucial to Josh, both in basketball and in his personal life? If you were asked to choose an alternative title for the book, what would it be?

This book is written in verse. Why do you think the author chose to write this way? How might the book be different if it was not written in verse? Find other verse novels in the library. How are they similar or different to *The Crossover*?

Consider how basketball terms are incorporated into the verse. Did you find it confusing, or helpful? How did it make you feel, and how did it help you to understand what Josh is feeling? In what ways is basketball crucial to *The Crossover*?

There are 'basketball rules' scattered throughout the novel. Choose one and write a paragraph on how the rule applies to what's happening in the story at the time it's introduced.

"If we didn't love each other, we'd hate each other" (page 29). Discuss how Josh and JB's relationship changes throughout the novel, and why. Do you think theirs is a normal sibling relationship? Why or why not? What examples can you find to support your view?

Jordan insists on being called JB, and Josh says he hates his nickname "Filthy McNasty." Find examples in the text of when the nickname is used and how Josh feels about it as part of his identity. Why might he feel this way? Discuss the power nicknames can have (for example, it can be used as a form of endearment or as a form of bullying).

Have a class discussion on traditional family roles, including the characteristics of each role and what relationship you would expect each role to have with the other. Consider questions such as:

- What are the responsibilities of a parent?
- How would you expect a parent to behave around their child when they're upset?
- What role does trust play in a family?

How does this apply to the characters in *The Crossover*? How does the twins' mother and father's parenting strategies differ?

The book is separated into game-themed sections: warm-up, first quarter, second quarter, etc. Why do you think the author chose to do this? In what ways do the events of the novel fit into their sections (warm-up introduces us to the characters, first quarter is before Josh and JB are fighting, etc).

Choose a section of the book and have a volunteer read it out loud (if you're struggling to decide, page 41 is a good one to try). How does hearing the verse out loud change your experience of it? You could consider elements like the pace, rhyme, cadence and more.

Reread page 45 and discuss the ways (visually and narratively) that *The Crossover* successfully builds suspense.

Were you surprised by Josh and JB's father's death? In what ways does the book foreshadow it? Find examples in the text, such as his attitude to doctors, his diet and his past medical history.

On page 120, Josh defines a 'tipping point.' What do you think the tipping point is in his relationship with JB, and why? How might events have played out differently if Alexis didn't start at the school, or if Josh didn't throw the ball at JB? How might they have been similar?

How is dialogue presented in *The Crossover*? Consider pages 138-139 in particular, when Josh is speaking with his mother. How does the text and design make clear which character says what? How is this different to a non-verse novel?

"Sometimes it's the things that aren't said that kill you" (page 150). Consider this quote and interpret its importance to *The Crossover* in different ways. How does JB's silence hurt Josh and why? How would characters communicating with each other more (eg Josh and JB fighting, their father's health issues have changed the course of the story?



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## Discussion Questions and Activities:

Pages 177-178 show a crucial moment in the narrative, using only pairs of words. Write your own story (around 100 words) using only paired words. What were the advantages and disadvantages of writing this way?

At several points in *The Crossover* Kwame Alexander's verse uses repetition (some examples are 'because' on page 185 and 'alone' on page 192). Why do you think he's chosen those particular words to repeat? How does it affect you as a reader?

Josh and JB are both faced with an impossible choice when their father has medical complications on the day of the final game. Josh chooses to play and JB does not. Do you agree with either decision? Why or why not?

### Exploring the Illustrations

Take a section of one of the graphic novels and recreate it as unillustrated prose. Think about how to convey the mood, imagery, action and dialogue in words, rather than in graphic novel style. After completing this exercise, have a class discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of each style. Which do you prefer writing?

*The Crossover* exists as a novel as well as a graphic novel. How might the reading experience be different? In what ways do the illustrations add to the narrative?

How is the art in *The Crossover* different to other graphic novels? You could consider the size and placement of the images, the use of colour or the lack of a gutter (a white space between the panels). How does this affect you as a reader? How might the book have been different to read if it had followed a more traditional graphic novel style?

Choose several spreads from the books and perform a visual analysis by responding to the following points:

- Objects – What objects and people can you see?
- Size – What size are the objects in relation to each other?
- Setting – Is a setting obvious? What is it?
- Position – Where are objects in relation to each other? Are they in the fore-, middle- or background?
- 'Camera' angle – From what angle do the pictures appear to be drawn? For example: high eye level, low, bird's eye view.
- 'Shot' type – What type of 'shot' has been used: close-up, medium, long, very long, etc.?
- Depth of Field – What is and isn't in focus?
- Light – Is the picture light or dark? Is it the same all over?
- Lines and vectors – In what direction do lines in the picture lead the eye?
- Body language and clothing – What facial expressions, gestures and use of space can you see? What is being worn?