

A Cultures & Connections Book Kit

Meet author Kwame Alexander and jump into his novel in verse about basketball and family.

Use the discussion questions to support critical reading and encourage students to engage with the text.

Learn about writing workshops for young people in locations around Ohio.

Go further by pairing **The Crossover** with nonfiction texts to support learning and meet Ohio's New Learning Standards.

The Crossover

by Kwame Alexander



About the Book

"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.

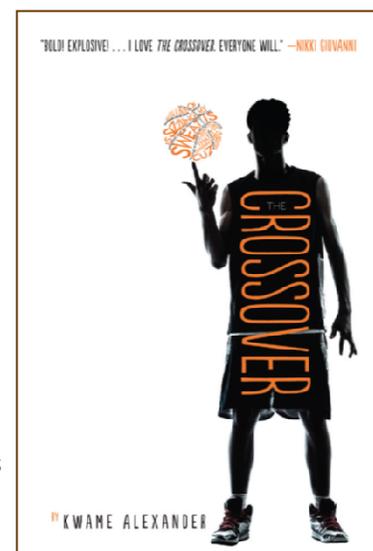
In this fast and furious middle grade novel of family and brotherhood by poet, novelist, and children's book author Kwame Alexander, twins John and Jordan must come to grips with growing up on and off the court, and realize breaking the rules comes at a terrible price. Their

story's heart-stopping climax proves a game-changer for the entire family. **The Crossover**, a 2014 Junior Library Guild selection, also tackles topics like sibling rivalry and health awareness, while offering rarely seen positive depictions of fatherhood.

HarperCollins, 2014.
ISBN 9780544107717. Ages 9-12. 750 Lexile.
<http://www.hmhco.com/shop/books/The-Crossover/9780544107717>

Available through the State Library of Ohio Talking Book Program:
<http://www.klas.com/talkingbooks/ohio>.

Available as an e-book through the Ohio Digital Library: <http://ohdbks.lib.overdrive.com>.



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Book kit Information

Educators: Cultures & Connections Book Kits may be used to support Ohio's New Learning Standards (Common Core) English Language Arts reading, writing, and speaking and listening standards. Examples follow; other standards also apply.

Librarians, parents, and others: The discussion questions and activities are also for library and community programs and home use. Learning Standards define what students should know and be able to do at each grade. They are included for teachers who want to use this book in school. For more information, see the Ohio Department of Education website, <http://education.ohio.gov>. Click on "Ohio's New Learning Standards" in the Teacher Resources section.



Photograph and biographical information courtesy Kwame Alexander; used with permission.

About the Author

Kwame Alexander has written 18 books, including his middle grade debut, *The Crossover*, and his award-winning children's book *Acoustic Rooster and His Barnyard Band*, a Choose to Read Ohio selection, which was recently optioned as a children's television show.

Alexander believes that poetry can change the world, and he uses it to inspire and empower young people

through his Book-in-a-Day literacy program, which has created more than 3,000 student authors at 69 schools across the US, Canada, and the Caribbean.

A regular speaker and workshop presenter, Alexander also travels the world planting seeds of literary love (Brazil, Italy, France, and Turkey). Recently, he led a delegation of 20 writers and activists to Ghana, where they delivered

books, built a library, and provided literacy professional development to 300 teachers, as a part of LEAP for Ghana, an International literacy program he co-founded.

The Kwame Alexander Papers, a collection of his writings, correspondence, and other professional and personal documents is held at the George Washington University's Gelman Library.

Author Resources

Kwame Alexander's official website
<http://www.bookinaday.org/>

Author Page on HarperCollins website
<http://www.hmhco.com/bookstore/authors/Kwame-Alexander/13698746>

Kwame Alexander's Facebook page
<https://www.facebook.com/KwameAlexanderBooks>

Kwame Alexander's Goodreads page
https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/326609.Kwame_Alexander

For publicity and speaking engagement inquiries:

Contact Kwame Alexander at Kwamepoet@gmail.com.

Talk About It!

References to Common Core standards are included for the convenience of teachers. The discussion questions are also for library programs, family activities, and other projects.

As students read or listen to this verse novel, encourage them to visualize each of the main characters and talk about what they look like and how they talk and act. Work together to draw character sketches or find magazine or Web-based images that look like these characters: Jordan (JB) Bell, Josh ("Filthy McNasty") Bell, Dad: Chuck Bell ("Da Man"), a former professional basketball player, Mom: Dr. Crystal Stanley-Bell, the assistant principal at the boys' school (Reggie Lewis Junior High). Talk about how the twins are alike and how they are different. For example, Jordan (JB) and Josh are identical twins, but JB shaves his head bald and plays shooting guard and Josh has shoulder-length dreadlocks (at first) and plays forward. It is usually Josh's point of view that we see as the story unfolds. [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4-6.3; RL.4-6.6; RL.4-6.7; SL.4-6.5]

This novel in verse is divided into six sections. Pause at the end of each section to talk about the main characters and what students are learning about JB and Josh in each section. Then consider the parallels with sports and the segments of a basketball game. Warm-up, First Quarter, Second Quarter, Third Quarter, Fourth Quarter, Overtime. [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4-6.1d; RL.6.3]

**"Sometimes
you have to
lean back
a little
and
fade away
to get
the best
shot."**

Nicknames are an important part of this story and help us understand and relate to the characters. Read aloud the poems "How I Got My Nickname" (pp.6-7) and "At first" (pp. 8-9) and talk about the significance of the nicknames in the story. Invite students to talk about the nicknames they have (or want) and how and why a person gets a nickname. When is it positive and fun and when is it embarrassing or uncomfortable?
[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4-6.1; SL.4-6.1d]

Set the stage by researching YouTube videos featuring some of the sports figures mentioned in the novel, such as Kevin Durant, LeBron James, Chris Paul, Magic Johnson, and Michael Jordan. Read aloud the poems "Josh Bell" (pp.4-5), "Jordan Bell" (pp. 11-12) or "Final Jeopardy" (pp. 157-158), which mention these basketball heroes. Invite a basketball coach or physical education teacher to collaborate with you in describing or demonstrating the game of basketball.

Several of the poems in this novel lend themselves to readers' theater performance, so that students can get a sense of the characters' voices. The following poems offer text in two parts: plain text and italicized text for two volunteers or two groups to read aloud in turn: "Conversation" (pp. 17-19), "The game is tied" (pp. 36), "Mom doesn't like us eating out" (pp. 41-42), "The inside of Mom and Dad's bedroom closet" (pp. 44-47), "Dad Takes Us to Krispy Kreme and Tells Us His Favorite Story (Again)" (pp. 63-65), "Mom calls me into the kitchen" (pp. 96-98), "Phone Conversation (I Sub for JB)" (pp. 106-109), "Suspension" (pp. 138-141), "I run into Dad's room" (pp. 165-167), "School's Out" (pp. 188-189) "Santa Claus Stops By" (pp. 207-209), "Questions" (pp. 210-211).
[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4-6.1b]

The author also introduces crucial vocabulary terms through twelve key poems presented at critical intervals throughout the book. "cross-o-ver" (p. 29), "ca-lam-i-ty" (p. 38-39), "pa-tel-la-tend-di-ni-tis" (pp. 48-49), "pul-chri-tu-di-nous" (p. 55), "hy-per-ten-sion" (p. 76), "i-ron-ic" (p. 104), "tip-ping point" (pp. 118-119), "chur-lish" (pp. 142-143), "pro-fuse-ly" (p. 154), "es-tranged" (p. 187), "my-o-car-d-al-in-farc-tion" (p. 201-202), "star-less" (p. 229). Talk with students about how the poet uses the usual dictionary format in presenting the vocabulary term: the word is shown in syllables, with a pronunciation guide, the part of speech is indicated, and the poem provides a kind of definition along with examples of the meaning of the word (using the phrase "as in"). Working together, look up some of these words in a dictionary (or online) and compare your finding with the vocabulary poem. Challenge students to write their own "vocabulary" poems, using Alexander's formula, for a new word they encounter in the book. [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4-6.1; RL.4-6.4; SL.4.-61d]

Discussion questions courtesy of Houghton Mifflin Press; written by Sylvia Vardell, a professor at Texas Woman's University and the author of **Poetry Aloud Here!** Used with permission. See <http://www.scribd.com/doc/213700130/Crossover-Discussion-Guide> for a complete discussion guide.

Explore More!

Writing workshops for young people are available in many communities through libraries, colleges and universities, or non-profit organizations. Check with your local library for opportunities in your area.

Cleveland Area

Cuyahoga County Public Library writing programs

Cuyahoga County Public Library offers fall and winter writing classes.

<http://www.cuyahogalibrary.org/Events/Writing-Programs.aspx>

Young Writers Workshop: John Carroll University

John Carroll's young writers' workshop is dedicated to teaching the craft of creative writing to high school students.

<http://sites.jcu.edu/yww/>

Cincinnati Area

Word Play

This nonprofit organization provides literacy and creative writing workshops for students in grades K-12.

<http://wordplaycincy.org/>

Columbus Area

Thurber House Writing Wizards

Thurber House offers writing workshops for students in grades 2-8.

<http://www.thurberhouse.org/writing-wizards.html>

Thurber House Young Writer's Studio

Young writers work on their craft with professional writers.

<http://www.thurberhouse.org/young-writers-studio.html>

Thurber House Flip the Page

Central Ohio's Teen Journal.

<http://www.thurberhouse.org/flip-the-page1.html>

The Ohio State University Young Writers Workshop

Ohio State's young writers' workshop is a week-long creative workshop for high school students.

<https://english.osu.edu/young-writers-workshop>

Dayton Area

Women Writing for Change: Classes for young women

Women writing for (a) Change offers writing classes for young women in grades 4-12.

<http://www.womenwriting.org/home/programs.html>

Granville

The Jonathan Reynolds Young Writer Workshop

This is an 8-day program for high school students.

<http://reynolds.denison.edu/>

Cultures & Connections

is a series of multicultural book kits that connect fiction and nonfiction texts, Ohio history and biography, and Ohio's New Learning Standards (Common Core).

Cultures & Connections was designed and produced by Desiree Thomas, as part of her fall 2014 internship at the State Library of Ohio, through the Kent State University School of Library and Information Science Culminating Experience (practicum) program.

This project was developed in conjunction with **Choose to Read Ohio**, a project of the State Library of Ohio and the Ohioana Library Association which encourages public libraries, schools, families, and others to build a community of readers and an appreciation of Ohio authors and literature.

Learn more about Choose to Read Ohio:
<http://library.ohio.gov/ctro>.

This toolkit created
September 2014.

Check it Out!

Combine fiction and nonfiction titles in print and multimedia to explore topics and themes in depth, to gain background knowledge and vocabulary, and to encourage comparison and analysis, all of which helps students to meet the expectations of the Common Core standards. The following titles can be used as companion pieces for **The Crossover**, and jumping-off points to create extensions.

Hip hop speaks to children: a celebration of poetry with a beat **Edited by Nikki Giovanni.**

This collection of poetry highlights the musical qualities inherent in poetry. The book comes with an audio CD containing performances of over 30 poems. Contributors include A Tribe Called Quest, Langston Hughes, Jacqueline Woodson, and Gary Soto.

Cool salsa: bilingual poems on growing up Latino in the United States **Edited by Lori M. Carson.**

Edited by Lori M. Carson, this collection of poetry examines what it means to grow up in two different worlds. These poems analyze the difficulties and joys of speaking two languages and being immersed in two cultures.

100 great poems for boys edited by Leslie Pockell.

In the spirit of **The Dangerous Book for Boys**, these poems speak to boys of all ages.

100 great poems for girls edited by Celia Johnson.

This collection of poems celebrates all aspects of girlhood. Poems about princesses, witches, and adventurers encourage girls to embrace their uniqueness.

The Surrender tree: poems of Cuba's struggle for freedom, by Margarita Engle

Cuba has fought three wars for independence, and still she is not free. This history in verse creates a lyrical portrait of Cuba.

The Fastest game on two feet: and other poems about how sports began **by Alice Low; illustrated by John O'Brien.**

Using conjecture and historical facts, this book of poetry and prose relates how nineteen sports got their start and grew into the games we know today.

Blues Journey by Walter Dean Myers.

A blues poem that revisits the history of the African American experience.

Other Resources for Young Writers

These resources can help students explore the craft of writing.

Young Writers Workshop

Founded in 1982, this workshop brings young writers across the country together to hone their craft: <http://theyoungwriters.org/>

Hip Hop Speaks to Children

In this video, Nikki Giovanni introduces the book **Hip Hop Speaks to Children**.
<http://youtu.be/6TPdLNYiITs>

Scholastic National Poetry Month

Teacher resources for National Poetry Month: <http://teacher.scholastic.com/poetry/>

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