

***Dope Sick* by Walter Dean Myers**

Reading Group Guide

About the Book

A drug deal has gone wrong, a police officer has been shot, and Lil J is holding a 9-millimeter handgun. When he climbs the stairs of an abandoned building, all Lil J wants is a chance to escape. But he has been trying to escape his whole life—from relationships, from school, and from himself. With the police gathering down below, Lil J sees visions of a horrific future and learns that he can't escape his present without confronting his past.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the significance of the book's title, *Dope Sick*?
2. What type of person does Lil J expect to encounter in the room of the abandoned building? How are his expectations influenced by the building's setting?
3. In chapter 1, Lil J says, "Kelly talked street, but I wasn't sure." What does this statement imply? Find several examples of "talking street" in the novel. What purpose does this street dialogue serve?
4. What does Lil J mean when he tells Lauryn, "Don't go white on me" (chapter 4)? When else is race brought up in the novel? Do these instances show racial stereotyping? Explain.
5. How does Lauryn "make [Lil J] feel like [he] was somebody" (chapter 4)? What are some other examples of Lil J looking for a feeling of self-worth?
6. Compare and contrast Lauryn and Sabrina. How are their relationships with Lil J similar, and how are they different?

7. When does Lil J start doing poorly in school? What is his reason for the drop in his behavior and his grades? Is this reason valid?
8. Why does Lil J use drugs? How do drugs make him feel? Does Lil J have any alternatives? Explain.
9. What does Lil J tell Kelly is the reason he didn't wait in line for the Home Depot job interview? Is Lil J's reason legitimate, or is he making an excuse? Is there a difference?
10. What does Lil J mean when he says, "But if I was all mapped out to be foul, too, I might as well join the other side" (chapter 5)?
11. Lil J doesn't get a good look at Kelly's face until the final chapter. Why do you think the author conceals Kelly's identity? Are there any clues in the book that give you information about Kelly? Explain.
12. The image of Lil J on the roof of the building with the gun appears throughout the novel. What is the significance of this motif?
13. Why does Kelly keep asking Lil J what he wants to change? What answer could Kelly be looking for? Does he get an answer by the end of the novel?

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