

THE BOOK AND BEYOND:

An educator’s guide for exploring children’s and YA literature



Title: The Crossover

Author(s): Kwame Alexander

Illustrator(s):

The aim of The Book and Beyond is to inspire an interest and passion for books and reading. This section is for your thoughts, questions and notes about different aspects of the book and to consider how you might frame discussion with students.

The book

Physical object

- The hardback edition is a standard A5 size and middle weight with standard paper that is soft, vanilla and musty.

Design & cover

- The cover has a large area of blank white space with a male basketballer in photo-like silhouette.
- The title appears in contrast, bright orange on black, vertically down his body.
- The ball balanced on his finger is made up of text from a poem in the book, which creates the movement and lines of a basketball.
- The ball (and finger) is repeated, but in close-up, on the back cover showing the interplay of words/colour as the ball.

Illustration

- Illustrations are used throughout the book as titles of each section.
- Basic line images of circles, dots and lines show associated basketball movements or game segments that connect to the title/structure e.g. ‘Warm Up’, ‘First Quarter’, ‘Overtime’.
- It’s a clever structure that poignantly highlights the significance of ‘Overtime’ at the end of the book, and how the characters have changed from ‘Warm up’.

Characters

- 12-year-old identical twins Josh (aka Filthy) and Jordon (JB) share a passion for basketball and are confident, talented players, but strive to be different from each other.
- The story is told from Josh’s point of view — he worries and is determined, focused on the game, fiery on the court, and sometimes off it too. We don’t learn much about JB’s thoughts.
- Loving parents: Mum is an assistant principal, Dad is a former professional basketball player.

Plot

- The story develops along with the season/year of basketball/school life.
- The challenge is for Josh and the team to be the greatest; encouraged and supported by their dad, and dealing with the legacy of his basketball success.
- Internally, Josh is dealing with strong emotions, relationships, mistakes, expectations — his and others — and the changes and challenges that come with becoming a teen and growing up.
- A heartfelt climax for the family to face.

Setting

- Set in the present day in a small anonymous un-named town in the U.S.
- This helps focus the story on the school, the close-knit African-American community and family, and the basketball-court action, contributing to a universal feel/appeal for a reader/listener.

Theme & message

- The main theme explores family life; brotherhood, love and loyalty, and identity.
- It also touches gently on messages about:
- success in sport — talent, practice and pressure;
 - loneliness and loss/grief;
 - atonement and forgiveness — rupture and repair;
 - health.

Language

- Rap poetry techniques — strong rhythm, rhyme, a theme and use of colloquial language and dialect.
- Combining poetic techniques with wordplay, this creates appeal and pace, contributes to Josh’s identity, feelings, and the themes.
- A range of poetry forms/types helps create the rhythm and mood of the book. E.g. rap, list poems, rule poems, free verse, rhyming couplets and conversation poems.

Mood & feeling

- The use of rhythm and the pace of the poetry contributes greatly to the upbeat, often fast and bouncy feeling and pace, as do Josh and JB’s dialogue, and the suspense and speed of the basketball games.
- The story builds to a tragic climax and bittersweet, sad ending. You feel carried along by the changing mood and pace.

Genre & format

- This is a novel in verse (aka verse novel) — every page is a poem or part of a poem. The poems work together to weave the story.
- It also fits into a description of ‘middle-grade fiction’.
- Is it also a sports book? Is that the crossover too?

The inquiry

Rich question(s)

This section is for creating and exploring questions that might guide an overall inquiry for a particular book. These questions might be inspired by ideas in the book section and/or personal responses and/or the NZ Curriculum and/or available resources.

- Why do humans play games? What makes a good or great game?
 - ‘Crossover’ is a basketball term and in the book also relates to physical and emotional boundaries. Why do we need boundaries in relationships with family and friends?
- What makes a good friend?
 - How do you know if a relationship is healthy or hurtful?

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Make connections

The aim of The Book and Beyond is to inspire an interest and passion for books and reading. This section is designed to help students use the book as inspiration to share, wonder, question, and explore ideas, possibilities, connections, feelings, experiences and other viewpoints — either alone or together.

Personal

- Explore**
- Paula Green’s Phantom National Poetry Day Schools Guide. Paula runs the popular Poetry Box children’s poetry blog. This resource is full of ideas about poetry you can create with your students.
- Create/write/illustrate**
- This provides a great way to introduce and explore poetry with students.
 - Use the book to find and list interesting, dramatic words and images.
 - Create your own word list from a favourite sport or activity then develop this into a ball shape or other shape poem. Use the basketball cover image art as a prompt.
 - There is a graphic novel edition of *The Crossover*. Prompt students to think about how they would draw/create the story in a comic/graphic style. Ask them to think about: lines and boxes, ‘camera’ and ‘shot’ angles, colour, clothing and setting. Get them to choose one poem or section to create a zine or graphic novel-style page to go with the text.

Read more

- Read the next in the series**
- The next in the series is *Rebound* a prequel to *The Crossover* and features Josh and Jordan’s Dad — Chuck as a young basketball star.
- Read another book by the same author**
- Booked* — verse novel about a soccer player.
 - The Undeclared*, illustrated by Kadir Nelson (non-fiction picture book, winner of 2020 Caldecott medal).
 - How to Read a Book*, illustrated by Melissa Sweet (an illustrated poem as a picture book)
 - The Crossover*, illustrated by Dawud Anyabuike (graphic novel edition)
- Read another book with the same idea/topic/genre**
- Check out a non-fiction basketball book or Kwame’s *The Playbook: 52 Rules to Aim, Shoot and Score in the Game called Life*. A collection of inspiration from famous figures, their story and images.
 - Or for a similar format try *Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds.
- Listen to an audio version of the book**
- The audio version is available in the [National Library Print Disability Collection](#), which you may be able to borrow from if students can’t use our print resources. Visit <https://natlib.govt.nz/collections/a-z/print-disabilities-collection> for information.
 - Can be freely downloaded from public library apps e.g. Libby, and some audiobook services/apps.

Social (Share your experience)

- Read aloud/Perform**
- This is a book that demands to be read aloud with a mix of free verse and hip-hop poetry — poems that use rhyme, rhythm and rap with sound effects.
 - Encourage students to find poems, choose their favourites, to read aloud and perform in pairs or groups. Give them time and tips for using pause, pace, volume and expression to bring them to life.
 - Good examples to show first:
 - ‘Dribbling’ (p3)
 - ‘Filthy McNasty’ (p10)
 - ‘At the End of the Warm Ups’ (p24)
 - ‘Ode to My Hair’ (p33)
 - How does hearing the verse out loud change your experience of it?
 - Do you like Josh’s ‘mad beats’? Can you write and rap like this too?
 - Check out [NZ Poetry Slam youth links](#).
- Talk**
- What’s in a name? Explore the idea of nicknames with students. (Read ‘How I Got My Nickname’ p6.) Do they have a nickname? Would they like a nickname? Are there times when nicknames are great — or not?
 - Discuss the power of nicknames — used as a term of affection/freindship and as a form of bullying.
 - As a group, collect the positive names.
- Watch together**
- [Upcoming Disney Plus TV series of The Crossover.](#)

What connections can you make to yourself, other texts, the world?

Text to self

- Connecting reading to our past and present experience. Students could connect to:
- What are your strengths?
 - What activities do you really love?
 - Who are important people in your life?
 - Do you get on with or clash with your sibling?

Text to text

- Find other verse novels in your library. What are the similarities and differences.
- Find other basketball and sport-themed books.
- This is a family story and a story of working hard at sport. What films/books/TV or other media do you know that are like this and build up to an important sports match or event. E.g. *Space Jam*, *Coach Carter*. What are the similarities and differences?

Text to world

- What’s your sport or activity you are passionate about?
- Are there rules, pressures, highs and lows?

NZ Curriculum

This section is intended as a prompt for thinking about how the book might relate to the NZ Curriculum. For example, is it a story about cultural diversity? What language, symbols and text tell the story?

| Learning areas | | Principles | | Values | | Key Competencies | |
|----------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| ● English | ○ Maths & Statistics | ○ High expectations | ○ Future focus | ● Excellence | ● Community & participation | ● Thinking | ● Relating to others |
| ● The Arts | ○ Science | ○ Treaty of Waitangi | ● Learning to learn | ○ Innovation, inquiry, curiosity | ○ Ecological sustainability | ● Using language, symbols & text | ○ Participating & contributing |
| ● Health & PE | ○ Social Sciences | ○ Cultural diversity | ○ Community engagement | ● Diversity | ● Integrity | ● Managing self | |
| ○ Languages | ○ Technology | ● Inclusion | | ● Equity | | | |