

Book Club/Independent Reading: *“The Other Wes Moore”*

The following questions can be used for a book club if a group of CASA Volunteers want to meet to discuss the book. Suggested book club format is on page 2 of this document. If you do a book club, please send a list of participants and time spent to pgerber@pgcasa.org so everyone can get their in-service hours. If you would like to read this book independently and write a reflection. Please choose 3-4 questions below and type your answers. You can either do this as an email or as a separate document to be emailed, mailed or faxed to the office. Please send to the attention of Penny Gerber.

1. How well does Moore describe the culture of the streets, where young boys grow up believing that violence transforms them into men? Talk about the street culture—its violence, drug dealing, disdain for education. What creates that ethos and why do so many young men find it attractive?
2. In writing about the Wes Moore who is in prison, Wes Moore the author says, "The chilling truth is that his life could have been mine. The tragedy is that my story could have been his." What do you make of that statement? Do you think Moore is correct?
3. Oprah Winfrey has said that "when you hear this story, it's going to turn the way you think about free will and fate upside down." So, which is it...freedom or determinism? If determinism, what kind of determinism—God, cosmic fate, environment, biology, psychology? Or if freedom, to what degree are we free to choose and create our own destiny?
4. The overriding question of this book is what critical factors in the lives of these two men, who were similar in many ways, created such a vast difference in their destinies?
5. Talk about the role of family—and especially the presence or absence of fathers—in the lives of children. Consider the role of the two mothers, Joy and Mary, as well as the care of the author's grandparents in this book.
6. Why did young Wes, who ran away from military school five times, finally decide to stay put?
7. Why was the author haunted by the story of his namesake? What was the reason he insisted on meeting him in prison? Talk about the awkwardness of the two Weses' first meeting and their gradual openness and sharing with one another.
8. From prison, the other Wes responded to the author's initial letter with his own letter, in which he said, "When you're in here, you think people don't even know you're alive anymore." Talk about the power of hope versus hopelessness for those imprisoned. What difference can it make to a prisoner to know that he or she is remembered?
8. The author Wes asked the prisoner Wes, "When did you first know you were a man?" Talk about the significance of that question...and how each man responded.
9. Has this book left you with any ideas for ameliorating the conditions that led to the imprisonment of the other Wes Moore? What can be done to ensure a more productive life for the many young men who grow up on the streets?

Questions by LitLovers

How to Lead a Book Group Discussion

1. Toss **one question** at a time out to the group. Use our [Book Discussion Resources](#) for help.

2. Select a **number of questions**, write each on an index card, and pass them out. Each member (or team of 2 or 3) takes a card and answers the question.

3. Use a **prompt** (an object) related to the story. It can help stimulate members' thinking about some aspect of the story. It's adult show & tell!

—maps, photographs, paintings, food, apparel, a music recording, a film sequence

4. Pick out a **specific passage** from the book—a description, an idea, a line of dialogue—and ask members to comment on it.

—How does the passage reflect a character...or the work's central meaning...or members' lives or personal beliefs?

5. Choose a **primary character** and ask members to comment on him or her. Consider:

—character traits, motivations, how he/she affects the story's events and characters, or revealing quotations.

6. Play a **literary game**. Use one of our [Icebreaker](#) activities. They're smart and fun—guaranteed to loosen you up and get your discussion off to a lively, even uproarious start.

7. Distribute **hand-outs** to everyone in order to refresh memories or use as talking points. Identify the primary characters and summarize the plot.