



## Harlem Summer

*Walter Dean Myers*

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Myers is at his clever best in this witty and action-packed, coming-of-age story of a teenager's summer during the Harlem Renaissance and his run-ins with famous gangsters, writers, and musicians.

It's 1925 and Mark Purvis is a 16-yr-old with a summer to kill. He'd rather jam with his jazz band (they need the practice), but is urged by his parents to get a job. As an assistant at The Crisis, a magazine for the "new Negro," Mark rubs shoulders with Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen. He's invited to a party at Alfred Knopf's place. He's making money, but not enough, and when piano player Fats Waller entices him and his buddies to make some fast cash, Mark finds himself crossing the gangster Dutch Schultz.

## Harlem Summer Details

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Author : Walter Dean Myers

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## From Reader Review Harlem Summer for online ebook

### Cindy Wise says

this was good. It was one of my favorite books about the Harlem Renaissance so far!

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### Caitlynn Williams says

This book was really good. This book is about days in Harlem and about the life of Mark Purvis. It also tells us about how there were "Gangster" and "Hoodlums" that sold illegal alcohol. In the story mark.

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### Andrea says

Appropriate Age: 7th grade and above

This poem takes the reader through a soulful journey about life in Harlem. The connective theme is song and voice, and how these people have taken their song from Africa, and changed/added to it through slavery and finally in their life in Harlem.

Walter Dean Myers grew up in Harlem, which gives him credibility to write in this genre. The cultural details are neatly integrated into the text and pictures through the readers exploration of Harlem. Although the overall tone of the text is not traditional to this culture, specific words and relations are established throughout the use of authentic language. The poetic nature of the text took over for the need to write in the dialect traditionally prevalent in Harlem.

The pictures in this book were the first thing that really caught my attention. Each piece of the picture is segmented- almost like it was cut and paste- into a beautiful mural. The contrast of colors really helps to accentuate the writer's motive on each page. After I read the book, I went back and looked at just the illustrations, which were created from a combination of ink, gouache, and collage, and was able to "read" the story just by viewing the artwork. It takes an incredibly strong illustrator to portray the meaning and passion without the text.

The text in this book was incredible as well. It actually took me a second time through the book to really understand the meaning of the book. It is written in poetry form, which has always been more difficult for me to analyze. However, I found that reading the text aloud (just as if I were reading to my students) really helped with my own comprehension. This book took me thorough the different aspects of a black adolescent's daily life in Harlem. It really made me think about how this was so different from my life growing up. For example, young children would routinely play in a fire hydrant on the street for entertainment, whereas I would have most likely been found in the park district swimming pool with my family and maybe a friend. The text also displayed the importance of religion in one's life, and how being bold and loud in your practice was expected. In my religious experiences, we were taught about religion in the form of lessons or Sunday school. We weren't included in the mass practices of the adults. The aspects of community demonstrated in this book really allow the reader to juxtapose this life to their own, which would

make this a great read-aloud book for older students. I am always looking for "picture books" to read to my students. I really believe there is never a student who is too old to have a book read aloud. I typically read aloud novels to aide in understanding, but to have a book with such meaningful and strong pictures is amazing!

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## **Jennifer Wardrip says**

Reviewed by Christian C. for TeensReadToo.com

It's the summer of 1925 in Harlem, a summer that sixteen-year-old Mark Purvis will never forget. In just a months time, Mark will get to meet the best and the worst people of New York City.

Mark gets a job at The Crisis, a magazine that promotes and encourages "New Negroes." The magazine was part of a movement created during that time with a mission to discover talented persons of color -- poets, novelists, and musicians -- and show them to the world.

But Mark is not so sure that he wants to become a "New Negro." What he really wants to do is become a famous jazz player and play the saxophone with his band. So when "Fats," a well known piano player who made records, offers him and his friend, Henry, what sounds like an "innocent" job loading trucks in New Jersey, Mark and Henry don't think twice. This could be the opportunity they were looking for, their big break, a golden chance to be with "Fats" and tell him all about their jazz band. Maybe he could even help them get a record deal.

What Mark didn't know is that the job was actually for the most dangerous man and leading bootlegger, Dutch Schultz. And Mark didn't know that what they helped load was illegal alcohol, and that the truck driver was going to drive away, all of a sudden, with the merchandise. And now Dutch Schultz wants his money back, and he wants Mark and Henry to pay for it.

Will Mark get the money for Dutch Shultz? Will Mark become a "New Negro?" Will he be able to keep his job at The Crisis? Or will Mark end up traveling the wrong path? You'll have to read the book to find out.

Every single word in Walter Dean Myers' book flows effortlessly in this entertaining novel. He makes writing look easy.

HARLEM SUMMERS is a book that will strike a chord with all readers. Parents will love the lack of cursing and sex often seen in young adult literature. (Although, to be honest, I think that the author could have used some more cursing to make the dialogue sound a little more realistic.) Teachers and librarians will LOVE this novel that complements perfectly what we studied in 8th-grade social studies. I'm sure that this book will soon be part of many recommended summer reading lists. nd teens will love the story, because after all... who wouldn't want to meet the head of a notorious gang?!

The end of the book contains a section with biographical information of real individuals that appear in the book and lived in New York City during that period, like Alfred Knopf, Langston Hughes, "Bumby" Johnson, and others.

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### **Kesi Augustine says**

This book attempts to expand young readers' imaginations about exactly what the Harlem Renaissance looked like by showing them a range of characters. I liked that this book made the editors and writers of The Crisis as real as the everyday churchgoers and the bootleggers. It felt really sweet to see Langston Hughes as a central, positive force in the protagonist's life. This book will work well in classrooms.

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### **Jennifer Cassidy says**

I really enjoyed the way the author included historical figures in the story. However, I did not understand how the 16 year old main character took the fall for the bootlegging.

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### **Sonny says**

This was a tremendous effort by Walter Dean Myers. I really enjoyed how he weaved real life Icons such as W.E.B. Dubois, Booker T. Washington, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen etc. into this portrait of youth that shows us how even the best intentioned can get caught up in truly adult situations. Superb rhythm to this story!

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### **April Helms says**

Mark picks up a summer job at "Crisis," an African American publication. But he also wants to get closer to famed musician Fats Waller, and quickly agrees to assist Fats in a sidejob. Unfortunately, things go wrong in this job, and soon Mark and his friends find themselves in hot water with the local gangsters. Combines an engaging and often humorous tale with actual historical figures such as the aforementioned Fats Waller, Langston Hughes, W.E.B. DuBois and Dutch Schultz. The appendix, with a brief biographical description and pictures of the people and places mentioned, were a nice touch.

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### **Ka'leneReads says**

This is a GoodRead! The Main character has the privilege of working around the Giants of the Renaissance & has the misfortune to also work with The Gangsters of the Underworld. This is my third read by Myers and I've come to realize the Books are 4All, I believe he specifically is trying to reach the Young Male readers.

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### **Summer Cull says**

All Mark wants to do is play his saxophone with the big boys some day. He dreams of being a great jazz

musician and practicing with his band, the fab 3, all summer long. But when his family loses a piece of land they were planning on selling for Mark's older brother's college tuition, Mark realizes it is more important to get a job over the summer. He is set up at a newspaper office where he learns all about the New Negroes. However, when Mark gets set up with a job that will earn him \$5, he gets into a predicament involving one of the biggest gangsters in Harlem: Dutch Schultz. One of Mark's acquaintances drove off with a shipment of Dutch Schultz's liquor and the gangster is demanding his money back. Mark bounces from one close call to another, all the while trying to appease his mother, play his sax, and get in with the big-time jazz players of Harlem.

This book reveals such a rich display of the Harlem culture during the time of prohibition. From the New Negroes movement to the swinging glamour of jazz music, Mark is navigating a world where he is trying to make something of himself. The book was written in 3rd person, but the narrator sounded much like Mark himself, making the book more personal to Mark's own experiences. The author used a lot of figurative language throughout the story, which gives the reader a more vivid picture of this time and setting. I particularly enjoyed the figurative language the author used when describing the Harlem heat of the summer. I have never been to Harlem before but I could practically feel the suffocating heat as he described it in the story.

The reading level for this book is grades 4-9.

I would use this book as a culture lesson on life in the 1920s. Through this book, the students could learn about Harlem culture, jazz, prohibition, etc.

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### **Deb says**

This was an OK book about life in Harlem during the Harlem Renaissance (1920s). It wove actual people through the novel and gives an explanation about who they are at the end. Good for middle school discussion or for black history month.

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### **Sherrell Jefferson says**

This is book left me with so many questions. Society conveys people's assumption and interpretation of the world when growing up. Mark is put into a situation where he's forced to get a job to help out his family raise money for his brother for college. To raise some extra money he takes on a job with a local musician Fats and gets himself into some trouble when his friend Crab Cakes runs off with the bootlegged wine, he returned it at the end of the book of course. After going through all that trouble to scramble up and get the money, he gets put in handcuffs anyways and when he gets there, notices how much respect Fats get and doesn't even get to take the blame for all that bs. But overall, it really had me thinking whose the "New Negro" of our generation?

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### **Youstra Bushehri says**

I really loved the writing of this book: easy, straight forward, fun. The story was entertaining and I loved that it featured real people (I enjoyed reading the section in the back of the book). I enjoyed the characters and the setting of the book.

Overall a really good book.

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### **Ari says**

I didn't really have any expectations of the story, I just wanted to get a better idea of what Harlem was like during the 1920s and on that front this book did not disappoint. I could feel the heat rising off the sidewalk and imagine all the nightclubs and aspiring musicians lining up to perform in the clubs. One of the most fascinating things about this book (for me anyway) was the characterization of DuBois. Many of you may know that there was a huge rift between W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington. Basically Washington wanted Black Americans to focus on being teachers, farmers, etc. He didn't really have a problem with segregation either. DuBois wanted Black Americans to enter politics, business and higher fields of education. He abhorred segregation. Both Washington and DuBois believed in education, they just wanted to sue the power of education differently. Anyway, I'm firmly on DuBois' side but this book portrays him in a mostly unflattering light. Everyone was terrified of him and he's seen as demanding and cold. I thought it was very interesting but I still love him for his ideas and starting The Crisis (one of the main Black newspapers of the time).

The story is funny, Mark tends to exaggerate and he doesn't always realize how grave a situation he's in. I did find it annoying how his luck always seemed to be good. Everything worked out for him, but the book could have been really sad if that wasn't the case. However I didn't mind it too much since I'm not in the mood for sad reads right now. Each chapter has an engaging title that makes you want to keep reading to figure out what it means. My personal favorite was "I Am Taken To Jail Like A Common Thug, Given The Third Degree, But Am Saved By My Reputation As An International Gangster, Bad Man, And The New Breed of Criminal." (pg. 134) The characters aren't as well developed as I would have liked. It very much seems to be written for young readers as an introduction to Harlem during the '20s, Mark meets some of the most famous people of the time. He also visits famous places, reads famous newspaper, etc. I just wish we learned more about the characters, instead they are simply commented upon as they pass by.

Harlem Summer is a lively story about a little known period of American history, the Harlem Renaissance. The fact that it reads like an introduction to the Harlem Renaissance both helps and hurts it. Older readers may roll their eyes at Mark's convenient connections to everyone famous in Harlem, but it's a great way to whet readers appetite for more. I wish the novel was longer so I could have learned more about Queenie (a Black female gangsta), Countee Cullen, Dubois, etc. I also wanted to know more about mark's family, his father is hilarious but his brother Matt remains a shadowy figure. I did like that Mark's mother and father both played a prominent (often amusing) role in his life. Prepare to visit Harlem and meet a character who has the best luck and gets in the wackiest scrapes.

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Love this quote from Mark's father "Mark, you are a young black man. Sometimes, living here in Harlem, we walk on the sunny side of the street and sometimes we walk on the shady side. I know that because I've been black a whole lot longer than you. Anything you've seen-I've lived. But I also know that you got to be careful on both sides of the street."

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### **Noor says**

"Harlem Summer" by Walter dean Myers is a great book. The story revolves around Mark Purvis, a 16 year

old who wants to become a musician. He really looks up to Fats Waller who is a famous musician and he couldn't say no when Fats asked him to help with a transporting job but he doesn't know that by helping Fats he was going to get on the bad side of Dutch Schultz, a gangster. I really enjoyed "Harlem Summer" because it takes place in 1925 and some of the characters are based on real life historical figures that lived in Harlem during this time.

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