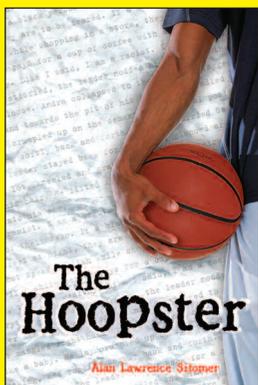


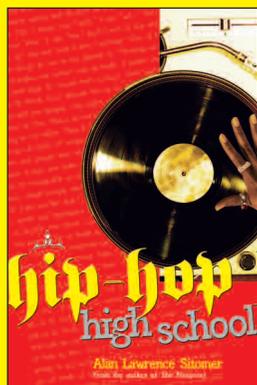
This guide was created by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer, a reading specialist and author of *Reaching for Sun*. Visit her Web site at www.tracievaughnzimmer.com to find many other book club guides.

The Hoopster Trilogy



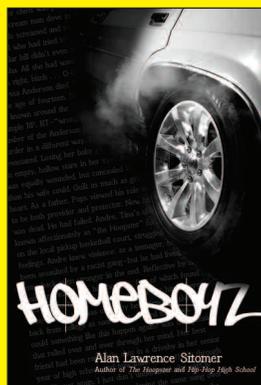
The Hoopster

Tr. ed. 0-7868-5483-9
ISBN-13: 978-0-7868-5483-7
224 pages • \$16.99
Pbk. ed. 0-7868-4910-X
ISBN-13: 978-0-7868-4910-9
\$5.99



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Tr. ed. 0-7868-5515-0
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384 pages • \$16.99
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\$8.99



Homeboyz

Tr. ed. 1-4231-0030-1
ISBN-13: 978-1-4231-0030-0
288 pages • \$16.99
Pbk. ed. 1-4231-0031-X
ISBN-13: 978-1-4231-0031-7
\$8.99
(Due Fall 2008)



Jump at the Sun

An imprint of Hyperion Books for Children / Disney Book Group

114 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10011-5690

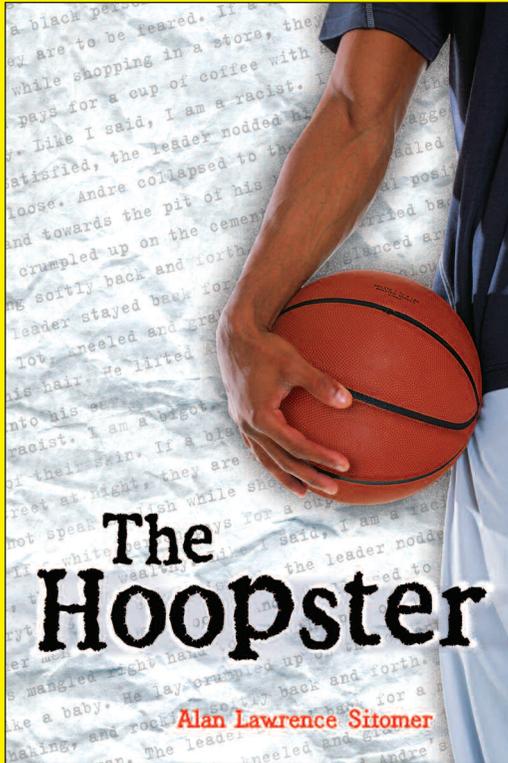
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The HOOPSTER TRILOGY

DISCUSSION GUIDE
JUMP AT THE SUN





The Hoopster

Andre Anderson has got it all together: work, play, and romance. As “the Hoopster,” he rules the local pickup basketball court. His new girlfriend, Gwen, is as smart, good-looking, and ambitious as he is. And at *Affairs* magazine, where Andre works as a summer intern, his featured personal essay on racism has just made him a local celebrity. As his boss says, Andre’s destiny awaits him—he just has to claim it. But the unflinching honesty of Andre’s writing soon makes him the target of hateful racism, and triumph turns to tragedy when Andre is violently assaulted by a vicious gang. When Andre withdraws into depression and unreachable silence, his family and friends fear he may never recover.

Discussion Questions

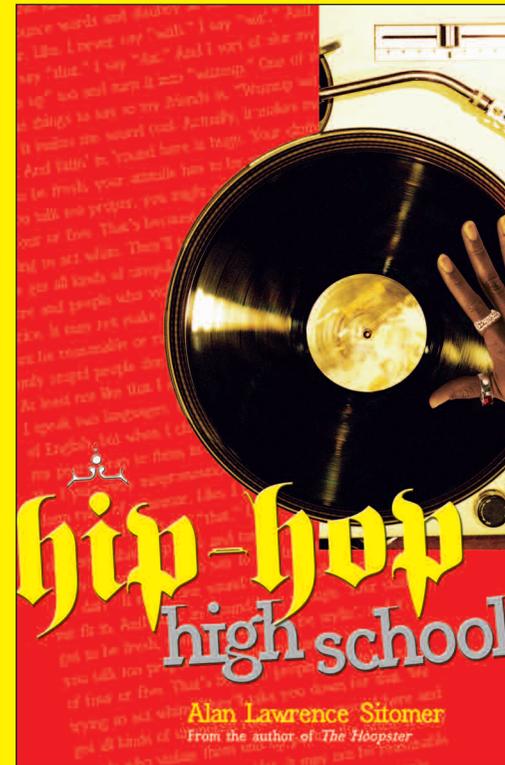
- 1 How is the friendship between Shawn, Andre, and Cedric introduced? Is this an accurate portrayal of young men’s friendships? How so? How do young men build friendships? Do you think it is a different process for young women? Why or why not?
- 2 Describe Shawn’s and Andre’s interests. How do they both critique and encourage each other? Where do they both work? If you had to choose one of their jobs, which position would you select? Why?
- 3 Explain how Andre gets a chance to write a feature article for *Affairs* magazine. Why does he turn it down at first? What advice does Mr. Jarvin offer him?
- 4 Describe how Shawn and Andre behave at each other’s house. Is there anywhere that you feel is a second home to you? What makes it this way? How did it develop over time?
- 5 What does Andre mean when he tells Cedric that his answer is an “Uncle Tom answer and you know it”? Why does he feel his cousin has sold out? Why doesn’t he think his cousin is funny? Would you? Have you ever felt betrayed in a similar way? How? What happens between Andre and Cedric the following day on the basketball court? With whom do you agree? Why?
- 6 What story does Pops share with Andre after his fight with Cedric? How and when does Pops become a victim? Do you agree? Are Cedric and Andre able to bury the hatchet? How? Do you think men are better at resolving disagreements?
- 7 How does Gwen and Andre’s date on the Fourth of July turn out? Why does it change so abruptly? Can you see both sides of the argument? Who in the scene displays the worst behavior? Why?
- 8 What is Mr. Jarvin’s reaction to Andre’s article? How is it received by the public? What happens that serves as a foreshadowing of the fact that all may not be perfect with this public demonstration of his beliefs? Do you think Mr. Jarvin should have warned Andre? Do you think it would have made a difference?

- 9 Describe how Andre is attacked in the parking garage. What reason do the attackers give for their assault? How does it mirror Pop's story from college? Is Andre able to heal from it both physically and emotionally? Do you think he will continue writing? How do you know?
- 10 How do Cedric and Shawn react to the violence inflicted on Andre? Is it fair for Shawn—who acknowledges that he cannot understand “what it is like to be a black man in this country,”—to call Cedric on his plan for revenge? In the end, what does Cedric decide to do? Why is he still conflicted about his choice? Who do you think is the bravest?

PROJECTS

Write your own lead article about race relations in your community. How have things changed since your parents were young? How could race relationships improve, and what do you think would make the biggest difference in those relationships?

Write an action scene inspired by the basketball scenes in *The Hoopster*. How does Sitomer use both action and dialogue to advance the momentum of the scene?



HIP-HOP HIGH SCHOOL

Theresa Anderson (Tee-Ay) is smarter than anyone knows. But with the example of her super-achiever older brother, Andre, towering above her, she hasn't even been trying. How can a girl compete against the family favorite, especially when he's a certified local hero? With parents and teachers always on her case, and her best friend pregnant and a dropout, Theresa turns to hip-hop for comfort. Her favorite singers seem to understand her when no one else does.

Everything changes when a new man comes into Theresa's life: Devon, whose tough-guy reputation conceals a blazing ambition for academic success. Devon helps Theresa face up to her own talent and ambition, and together they set off on a three-year quest to beat the SAT

and get into top colleges. But then Devon gets shot in a street fight, leaving Theresa with two piles of unfinished college applications—her own and Dev’s—and time running out. . . .

In this funny and inspiring sequel to *The Hoopster*, Andre Anderson’s sister Theresa tells the story in her own hip-hop-flava’d voice of how she came from behind to go up against one of the baddest monsters of high school—the SAT—and won.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 Describe the setting for *Hip-Hop High School*. Compare it to your own school experience. What things are similar and what things are different? How important is the setting to this story? How are the characters affected by the world they try to navigate?
- 2 Explain how things get started for Tee-Ay in the new school year. What classes does she have? Is she a good student? What choices does she make about school?
- 3 Who are Tee-Ay’s best friends? Create a Venn diagram to compare their similarities and differences. Who do you think is the better influence on Theresa? What does Tee-Ay realize about herself through these friendships?
- 4 Why doesn’t Tee-Ay get along with her mother? Do you think her mom is especially hard on Theresa or is she only looking out for Theresa’s best interests? Does Theresa get blamed unfairly for things she didn’t do? Do you think that in every family someone has it easier than the other members? Why or why not?
- 5 Who is Tee-Ay’s brother? Why is it difficult for Theresa to live in the shadow of his success? Do you think it would be more difficult to come after a sibling who was especially successful or one who was exceptionally troubled? How do we define ourselves outside of our families?
- 6 Cee-Saw gets Tee-Ay to attend the “party of the century.” How does Tee-Ay escape her punishment? Explain what happens at the party and the consequences that follow. How does it haunt Tee-Ay at home and at school? Would you be mad that your friend faced no consequences while your punishment was severe?

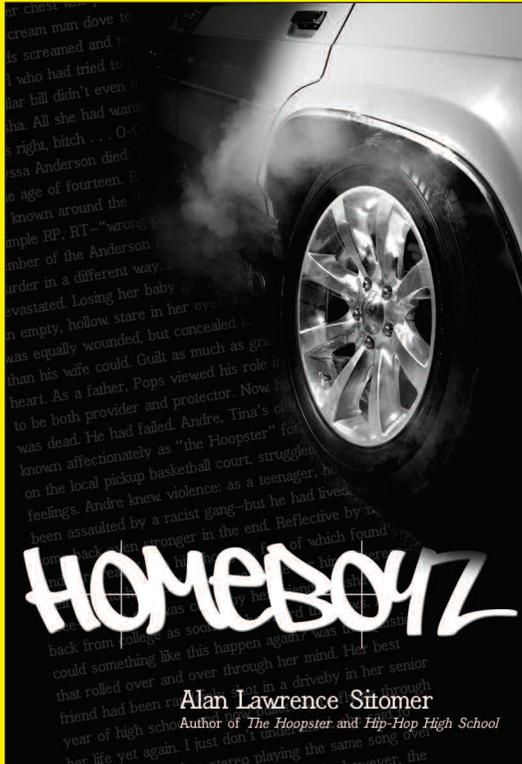
- 7 What book really changes Tee-Ay’s perspective? What book has most influenced your own thinking? Why? Have you had any luck persuading any of your friends to read it? Does Tee-Ay have any luck getting her friends to read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*? Why? Do you believe that a movie or other form of media can influence a person the same way that a book can? Why or why not?
- 8 Compare the choices that Tee-Ay makes to those of her friends—Cee-Saw, Sonia, and Jax. Which decisions end up being the most important? How close is Tee-Ay from the same fate? Are some decisions simply more important than others? How do you know which ones are the most important? How do you make important choices?
- 9 How does Devon’s friendship change Theresa? What does she learn from him about the SAT and life in general? Over time, how does their friendship develop? What secrets do they share with each other? What tragic thing happens to Devon? How does Tee-Ay respond to it? What does she do for him that ultimately ends up being for her, too?
- 10 At graduation, Theresa apologizes to her mom. What for? Her mother answers, “one day you’ll do this for your own daughter, and that’s when you’ll have paid me back. Paid me back and then some” (page 367). What does her mother mean by this? How has Tee-Ay changed from the beginning of this story to the end?

PROJECTS

Explore the free SAT prep links on the author’s Web site. Print out at least five pages where you’ve explored a subject with which you have difficulty. List what you learned.

Create a vocabulary list from the novel—include words Tee-Ay uses that would be good to know for the SAT and any other words whose meanings you discover as you read.

Tee-Ay says that “In my head I talk a normal kind of English, but when I chat with my friends or any of my peers I rap to them in this kind of ghetto slang. It’s like I purposely mispronounce words and disobey all them rules of grammar” (page 5). As you read the novel, create a glossary of words that Tee-Ay and her friends use to describe their world. Add five words from your own vocabulary that someone on the outside might not understand. (Use an asterisk to note the words you added.)



HOMEBOYZ

When Teddy Anderson's little sister, Tina, is gunned down randomly in a drive-by shooting, the gangstas who rule the streets in the Anderson family's rapidly deteriorating neighborhood dismiss the incident as just another case of RP, RT—wrong place, wrong time. According to gangsta logic, Tina doesn't even count as a statistic.

Teddy's family is devastated. Mrs. Anderson sinks into a deep depression, while Pops struggles to run both the household and his declining laundry business. The Andersons are further shocked when Teddy is arrested and thrown into prison for attempted homicide after his elaborately laid plans for revenge against his sister's killer are foiled by the cops.

Teddy soon finds himself under house arrest and performing endless hours of community service. As he goes through the motions of complying with the terms of his probation, he is actually hacking into a computer mainframe to seek ultimate vengeance. Will Teddy learn that despite his genius abilities with computers he doesn't really know it all?

Discussion Questions

- 1 What is the central event of the novel? How does this one incident affect every character and plot point that follows it? Why do you think the author chose to open the story with this scene?
- 2 Describe Teddy Anderson—his appearance, actions, intellect, and how others see him. Why is he so angry? What does he want to do with that anger?
- 3 Explain the gangsta logic that rules life in the inner city. What did you learn that surprised you in this description? Are there laws that govern your own neighborhood? What are they?
- 4 Describe the scene where Teddy tries to take revenge on the gang. How does his plan work? What has he not prepared for? How does it end?
- 5 Would you be able to hold your tongue in the presence of the Honorable Judge Lynch? Do you think Teddy should be given special consideration or not? What is his punishment?
- 6 Recount what Teddy's days and nights are like inside the HJH. Why is a sentence of two weeks particularly long to him? How would you survive in such a place? Do you think knowing how bad these places can be would deter anyone?
- 7 What are the details of Teddy's parole? What is a "sez-me" order? What do you think would be the most difficult aspect of Teddy's sentence?
- 8 How does the family deal with Teddy's incarceration and his path to revenge? How does he show disrespect to each member of the family? How does Mrs. Anderson handle the events of the last several weeks? What would happen to your own family in a similar situation?

- 9 Why is Teddy such an angry young man? What happened in his past that made him so mistrustful and unhappy? How does he plan to seek his revenge and maintain his freedom at the same time? Would you consider Teddy a hero or a thug? Why?
- 10 Teddy and Diaz disagree about the nature of the criminal justice system. Teddy believes it is racist, but Diaz thinks he's wrong. She says, "When gangs kill people, the blood spills red" (page 152). What does she mean by this? With whom do you agree?
- 11 How do Teddy and Micah get along at first? How is their relationship finally forged? What important lessons does Teddy teach Micah about language, sexuality, and women? Why is it important that Teddy takes Micah home? What is Micah's own story, and why does it wake Teddy up?
- 12 In the end, what happens to Tina's killer? How does Micah help Teddy uncover the truth about that fateful day? Why does he take such a risk? Does Teddy follow through with his plan to disappear? Why or why not?

PROJECTS

Research one of the following topics from the novel:

- Hackers
- Gang violence
- Inner-city poverty
- Urban school budgets
- At-risk youth
- Drive-by shootings
- Gang activity
- Youth offenders
- Truancy

Create a Web site or PowerPoint presentation on one of the topics, and share what you learned with your class.

Music

Create an MP3 playlist for the book with at least ten songs you think might be found on the sound track to the movie version of the book.



AUTHOR INTERVIEW

1 Did you have plot ideas planned out for each book before you started, or did you just follow where the series led you?

When I first set out to write this trilogy, I knew a few things. First, I wanted to use the same family for the whole series, but I wanted to have each sibling in the family be his/her own unique protagonist for each of the novels as I went along. This allowed me to tell an individual story for each of my heroes at roughly the same age of their lives (seventeen) that was interrelated to the other books but still unique to their own lives and perspectives. Next, I wanted to hit three major areas of great interest to all my students (note: I am a high school English teacher in inner-city Los Angeles). Those areas are hoops, hip-hop, and gangs. Essentially, my aim was to write a trilogy that would engage and inspire reluctant readers. Many of my students had never read a book from cover to cover in their entire lives until my novels crossed their paths. Now they are much more willing to embrace books, because they have seen the relevance, power, and magic of literature. From that point of view, things have been quite amazing for me.

So basically, the answer is yes and no. I did have a vision for each of the books before I started, but it was not until I had written *The Hoopster* that I started plotting *Hip-Hop High School* and then, once I was done with *Hip-Hop High School*, I completed *Homeboyz*.

2 How much research did you have to do to bring the hardscrabble world of these inner-city kids to life?

Each of the books has its own unique elements. For certain things, I definitely did a lot of research in order to try to bring authenticity to the book. For example, for *Homeboyz*, I visited juvenile jails and spoke at great length with many people in the juvenile justice system. For other parts of my books, I took material straight out of my own life. The basketball scenes from *The Hoopster* were written exactly as I used to live them when I was a teen—I played ball all the time, and we talked smack to one another on the court



up and down all day, every day. Basically, it's a combination of research and having lived a lot of experiences that resemble experiences my characters go through in my books. I think the reason I feel comfortable writing about this world is that I currently teach high school in a place that resembles *Hip-Hop High School* in certain ways, and I spend a great deal of time getting to know my students in a personal way that extends beyond the classroom. For the times when I needed to do research, I did it, but for most of the novels, I just wrote about what I already knew and invented the rest.

3 Which of the three books was most difficult to write? Why? What did you learn about your own process as you created this series?

Each book had its own challenges, but Teddy's book, *Homeboyz*, was definitely my most challenging for a few reasons. One, it's a very complex book—my most complex work to date. But even more challenging for me was writing for a protagonist who is a genius. Teddy has brains galore, and the fact that he is so smart made writing for him uniquely problematic. As much as Teddy tortures other people—both physically and mentally—he tortured me more. It was never a case of “what would I do in this situation?”—it was always a question of “what would a troubled teen genius do in this situation?” and since I am not a genius, sometimes that question caused me to pull my hair out. As a writer, I found Teddy to be the type of character that gets you talking to yourself, that's for sure.

4 What can your fans look forward to next?

My next book will be titled *The Secret Story of Sonia Rodriguez*. Those who are familiar with Sonia (she was Tee-Ay's Latina best friend in *Hip-Hop High School*) will discover that Sonia kept a deep and dark secret from the rest of the world, and in this book, she reveals it. My feeling is that fans will not be disappointed in the slightest.

5 What advice do you have for young writers?

First of all, I always loved to write. In high school, I used to pass the time in my “boring” classes by writing short stories and poetry and things like that. In college at the University of Southern California, I continued to write and write and write. Not for money or with professional ambitions; I just did it because I found a great deal of personal fulfillment in it. I guess I simply enjoyed writing the way a musician enjoys playing the guitar or an athlete enjoys tossing the football around. Like I said, I always did it because I loved it.

Then, when I graduated from USC, I became more ambitious and decided to take a crack at writing professionally. And then I was rejected. And rejected and rejected and rejected.

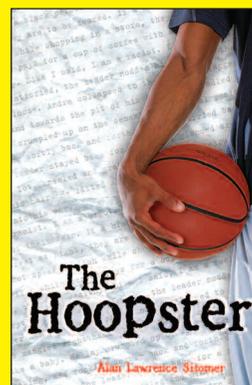
In truth, it took me fourteen years to really move into the realm of becoming a professional writer. I only say this because while I have always believed in myself and feel I have talent, talent is NOT the reason I am where I am today. Tenacity is. Fortitude is. Work ethic is. If I do enjoy any success today—and trust me, I do—it is because I refused to give up on myself.

Now, it's one thing to say this but it's yet another to really live it. I did. I worked in a bookstore—and I wrote. I worked as a waiter—and I wrote. I sold handmade Persian rugs on weekends—and I wrote. And I wrote and I wrote and I wrote. And, like I said, I got rejected and rejected and rejected.

I'm sure many writers across the land dedicated themselves to realizing their dreams as an author on the very same day that I set out to bring mine to fruition. But as the years went on, how many of them stuck with it the way I did? How many of them do you think are currently still pursuing their dreams with the same energy, enthusiasm, passion, and vigor that I am? Probably not a lot.

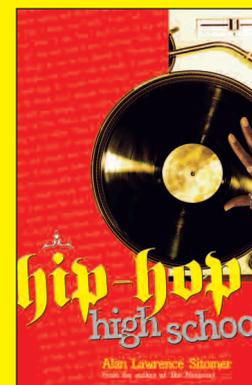
So, how did I become a professional writer? I did so the same way all people who ultimately realize their dreams do—I refused to give up and I worked my butt off no matter how hard it got. I became a writer by continuing to believe in myself and by continuing to write. And hey, it only took me fourteen years. I was prepared for it to take fifty.

The Hoopster Trilogy



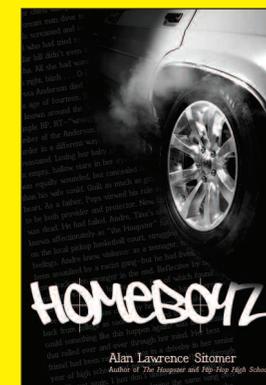
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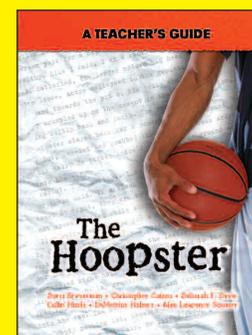
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\$8.99
(Due Fall 2008)



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Pbk. ed. 0-7868-5699-8
ISBN-13: 978-0-7868-5699-2
96 pages • \$24.95