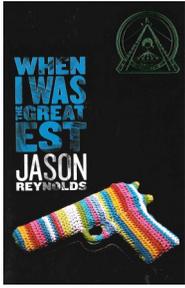


Books by the Stack



When I Was the Greatest by Jason Reynolds

Living in a Brooklyn neighborhood known for guns and drugs, Ali, his sister, and their neighbors stay out of trouble until they go to the wrong party, where one of them gets badly hurt and another leaves with a target on his back.

Why you'll like it: urban fiction, funny, family, loyalty

About the Author: Jason Reynolds is the author of *When I Was the Greatest*, for which he won the Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe Award for New Talent. His debut middle grade book, *As Brave As You*, was awarded the 2016 Kirkus Prize for young readers'. His other works include *Boy in the Black Suit*, and *All American Boys*. Reynolds is a graduate of The University of Maryland, College Park. Reynolds is on faculty at Lesley University, for the Writing For Young People MFA Program, and currently resides in Brooklyn, New York (Bowker Author Biography)

Questions for Discussion

1. In the opening chapter, how does Ali feel about family? How do you know?
2. What are the ages of Needles and Noodles? Which brother acts the oldest? What is ironic about their relationship?
3. Where is the novel set? Why does Reynolds go into such great detail when introducing the setting?
4. Compare and contrast Ali's family life to Noodles' and Needles' family life.
5. Why do many characters in the novel have nicknames? Explain how Ali, Needles, and Noodles get their nicknames. What effect does this have on each of the characters?
6. How does Noodles treat Needles? How is his treatment of Needles different from the way the neighborhood treats him?
7. Analyze Doris's decision to give knitting needles to Needles. Explain whether you think it was a good or bad idea.
8. How does Reynolds choice to include the story about the big guy sitting down to knit with the ladies in KnitWit make knitting seem more appropriate for Noodles? What was the author's purpose of including this detail.
9. How does Ali know that Noodles is not really a tough dude?
10. What happened to Ali's father? Where is he now? How does Ali feel toward his father?
11. Who is Malloy? How does Malloy feel about fighting? Would Malloy still have trained Ali if Ali said he was mad at this father? How do you know?

- 12.** What is the relationship between Noodles and Needles and their mother? What type of person is she?
- 13.** Throughout Chapter 9, Ali keeps referring to his shoes. How important is it to Ali to keep them clean? Why do you think the shoes are so important?
- 14.** In Chapter 10, Ali says that in his neighborhood his word is his bond. What are some other examples of neighborhood codes of honor? What does this say about the neighborhood? How does this impact the mood of the novel?
- 15.** In Chapter 10, we find out why Noodles is really mad at Needles. Do you think he has a valid reason to be mad at him? Does this realization help develop a major theme throughout the novel?

(Questions provided by publisher)



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