

## Walter Dean Myers Visits Cheltenham

May 17, 2013

“Have you ever been locked up?”

“What was the first luxury you bought with a paycheck?”

“How do you start your stories?”

These are three of several pointed questions students had an opportunity to ask author Walter Dean Myers and his son, illustrator Christopher Myers on May 17 at the Cheltenham Youth Facility. In January, Librarian of Congress James Billington appointed Mr. Myers National Ambassador for Young People’s Literature, a two-year term. Mr. Myers visited Cheltenham as part of an ambassadorship tour by arrangement through Phoebe Stein Davis, Director of the Maryland Humanities Council and Andrea D. Lewis, Program Officer for the Maryland Center for the Book, Maryland Humanities Council.

Mr. Myers said that he read a lot when he was growing up. Although he never graduated from high school, he remembered a teacher who told him that whatever he did to continue writing. Mr. Myers was raised in Harlem, a New York City borough in Manhattan.



From left, Cheltenham Youth Facility School Principal C. Anthony Thompson, Illustrator Christopher Myers, Author Walter Dean Myers, and Sheree White, Cheltenham Youth Facility Media Specialist

According to Mr. Myers, a multi-award winning author of more than 100 books, there were no stories like his own. There were no “real stories about young black guys, my neighborhood, a father who was a janitor or a mother who did day work.”

“I write about the things I missed in books growing up,” said Mr. Myers.

According to Mr. Myers, “Half of your story is an interesting character and a problem .” Mr. Myers starts each day at 5:00 a.m. “I feed my wife’s cat, make coffee, and write five pages,” said Mr. Myers. Mr. Myers explained that when he is not writing he is planning his next book with a detailed outline.



**Illustrator Christopher Myers (left) with his father, author Walter Dean Myers. These mural images were included in a father-son collaborative picture book titled *We Are America*.**

Christopher Myers illustrated the cover for *Monster*, a book that his “Pop” wrote in 1997. It is one of several Myers books that continues to appeal to young audiences and one of several collaborative father-son projects.

“I make a lot of money, man,” said Mr. Myers. He emphasized, however, that it’s “not about the money.”

“I write to make myself feel better,” said Mr. Myers.

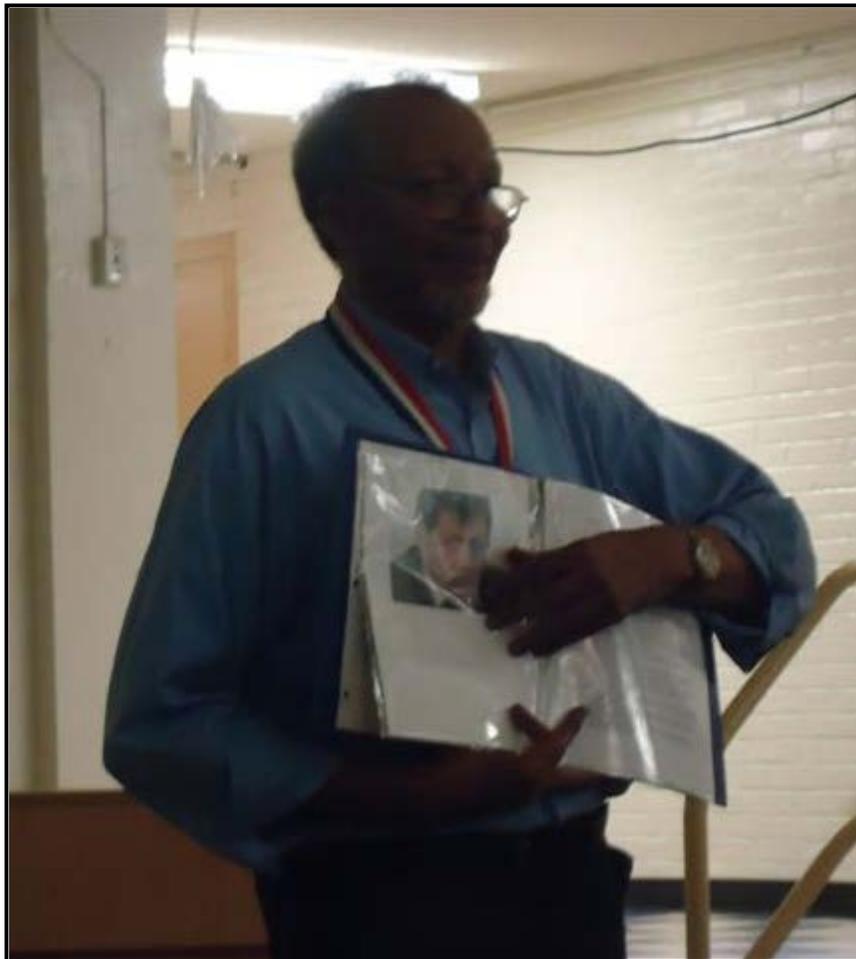
“Everybody has a story,” said Christopher Myers. “Either you are going to tell it or somebody else will tell it.”

“My whole family tells stories,” said Christopher Myers. “That’s just how we are.”

Cheltenham students prepared for the Myers’ visit by reading Mr. Myers’ autobiography *Bad Boy* and his novel *Lockdown* in the Language Arts classroom. The students self selected other books by Myers to supplement their classroom reading experience.

*Lockdown* is a story about Reese, a fourteen-year-old in juvenile detention and the opportunity for second chances. According to Mr. Myers, sometimes we get “in our own heads so heavy and so deep that we can’t get out.”

Mr. Myers talked about his own experience with writing and rejection slips and second chances. He said that after the pile of rejection slips measured six inches he would “throw them out and start over.”



**Mr. Myers explained how he writes a book based on a detailed outline.**



**Phoebe Davis Stein (left), Director of the Maryland Humanities Council and Sheree White, Cheltenham Youth Facility Media Specialist.**



**Andrea D. Lewis (left), Program Officer for the Maryland Center for the Book, Maryland Humanities Council and Phoebe Stein Davis, Director of the Maryland Humanities Council.**