

A study guide prepared by IYC Tutor Byron Eden

**No Way Out**  
By Peggy Kern

As you read this book, No Way Out, please make a list of all words that are used in the book that you do not know the meaning of. Bring your list to class each week, along with your copy of the book, and this study guide, and we will resolve vocabulary words that you find.

**CHAPTER 1**

1. This book begins with Harold Davis, a freshman at Bluford High School taking care of his grandmother who was injured in a recent fall. Based on what you have read in this chapter, what kind of relationship does Harold have with his grandmother? Why does the responsibility of caring for his grandmother fall on Harold? Why isn't there someone else to take care of her?
2. Taking care of grandma is a big task for Harold. In addition to his school work, Harold also needs to help his grandmother by doing the cooking, shopping, dishes, laundry, cleaning, and most importantly, by providing the medical assistance that is needed for her full recovery. (p.11) The chapter ends with Harold going to sleep—with one thought or worry on his mind. What is it?

**CHAPTER 2**

1. The next day grandma is sitting at the kitchen table going through the bills, when she tells Harold that they will have to be very careful with their money in the months ahead so as to stay on budget in order to pay the medical bills. (p.14) Harold volunteers to get a job. What is grandma's response to this idea?
2. Harold is worried about the medical bills too. He quickly saw bills from the hospital and emergency room for over \$3000.00. At this point in the story, where do you think Harold and grandma will come up with the money to pay these bills?
3. Harold and grandma are visited by Cindy Gibson, a neighbor girl who is also a classmate of Harold's. (p.17) Harold has liked Cindy since 8<sup>th</sup> grade when he asked her to a movie. What was the result of that attempt at a date?
4. Students at Bluford often teased Harold about his weight. (p18) "Someone get that boy a bra". "He so fat he has his own zip code". "Dude needs a driveway to iron his shirt". Is it possible for a boy to like a girl, or a girl like a boy, even if one of them is quite a bit overweight? Is physical attraction the only reason for people to like each other? How do blind people fall in love, if they can't see the possible imperfections in each other?
5. Grandma asks Harold and Cindy to go to the store, but cautions them to avoid the James brothers. Cindy and Harold walk to the grocery store, but just as grandma feared, the James brothers, Londell and his younger brother Jupiter, are standing around outside. (p.23-24) What do we know about Londell and Jupiter James?
6. Harold and Cindy finish their shopping, and when they check out the bill comes to \$83.13, even though Harold only has \$70 in cash to pay for the grocery items.

- The cashier suggests that they put something back. (p.28) The most expensive item is \$16.50, which Harold refuses to put back. What is it, and why does Harold insist that he can't put it back?
7. After a great deal of embarrassment at the check out counter, how is the issue of this shortage resolved?
  8. (p.30) Cindy reminds Harold that grandma would not approve of Harold taking money from Londell James, and she even leaves Harold in the store over his decision. Why does Harold decide to take the money from Londell?
  9. (p.32) Harold promises that he will pay Londell back, but Londell says, "Don't worry about it. Maybe someday I'll need a favor and you can help me out. Like I said, men like us got to think about the future. We ain't got parents to take care of things. Londell put his hand on Harold's shoulder. But you know that don't you?" What kind of favor do you think that Londell might ask Harold to do in the future?

### **CHAPTER 3**

1. When Harold returns to school he is greeted by his best friend, Darrell Mercer. (p.38) At lunchtime Darrell is surprised when Harold does not buy the spaghetti, one of Harold's favorite meals. Why did Harold pass on spaghetti day?
2. (p.39-42) Darrell asks Harold to attend the final wrestling match of the season after school, but Harold declines the invitation. Why does Harold refuse to join his friend Darrell at the wrestling match?
3. (p.41) "Anger flared deep in Harold's chest. He knew Darrell felt sorry for him, and he hated it. I don't need you or your family, he thought. The words boiled inside him. 'Guys, tell Harold he should come', Darrell said. The table suddenly grew silent. Agonizing seconds passed in silence". Why was this so embarrassing to Harold?
4. (p.43) On his way home from school Harold walked past the grocery store and noticed the "Help Wanted" sign in the window. Harold went in and applied for a job. What do you think grandma would say? The store manager said that Harold would need to bring in a note from grandma, giving permission to work. How is Harold going to pull that off?
5. (p.45-49) Harold no sooner gets the job offer at the grocery store when he runs into Londell James, who offers him a job, paying three times what Harold would make at the store. Do you think that Harold will take the job from Londell, knowing that he will be working for a drug dealer? How would Harold keep this information from grandma? What will the other students at Bluford think? What will Darrell and Cindy think?

### **CHAPTER 4**

1. Chapter 4 begins with Harold working at the grocery store as a box boy after school. It is hard work, but Harold knew that he was at least earning some money to help grandma out. (p.53)When he gets paid the first time Harold was amazed to see that even though he had earned \$65.25, he was only able to take home

- \$48.20. All the rest went to taxes and deductions. What thoughts are going through Harold's mind as he walks home with his first paycheck? What kind of taxes and deductions do you think are kept from the money earned by drug dealers?
2. When he gets home Harold finds his neighbor, Mr. Harris, making dinner for grandma and Harold. It was a healthy meal, with lots of vegetables that are on grandma's new diet. Mr. Harris volunteers to take Harold with him on Saturday for his shopping, to buy the foods on the list provided by grandma's doctors. Mr. Harris has been very kind to Harold and grandma – letting Harold stay at his apartment while grandma was in the hospital, preparing dinner for them, and now offering to help with the shopping. Have you ever had someone who is not a relative help you out like this?
  3. When Harold goes to Mr. Harris's apartment to return a cutting board that had been left behind, Harold learns that Mr. Harris is enrolled in college. (p.61) When Harold suggests that he should join the Marines, what does Mr. Harris suggest instead?
  4. Harold is up all night, worried about how little money he has earned. When he goes into the kitchen he sees grandma's stack of papers. Even though he knows he should not snoop, Harold looks through the papers, and learns that grandma is nearly \$10,000.00 in debt, with a threatening note from a collection agency. (p.63) "Harold trembled as the truth crushed down on him. With their bills, Grandma couldn't afford to live in the apartment. There was no way she could provide for him. The collection agency would come and take everything. There was **No Way Out**. Harold gripped the carpet and let out a soft cry as Londell's words crashed through his mind like thunder. 'We're all on our own. Might as well be orphans'." Have you ever known anyone who faced debts that appeared to be something that could never be paid? How do you think people feel when there is no way out, and hopelessness sets in?
  5. In addition to the bills, Harold also sees a letter from the social worker, informing grandma that she must designate a guardian for her grandson, Harold, in the event of her disability, death, or if she is otherwise unable to provide for him. In bold print the letter ends "Should no guardian be available, the state will take custody of Harold Davis until permanent placement can be found". "Londell's words crashed through his mind like thunder. 'We're all on our own. Might as well be orphans'." How do you think that Harold feels upon reading this?
  6. The next day Harold walks into the grocery store after school and quits. What do you think Harold plans to do now?

## CHAPTER 5

1. This Chapter begins with Harold on a bus, en route to the playground on 25<sup>th</sup> Street, where Londell told Harold he could be found, if Harold was interested in a job. (p.65) What kind of neighborhood is this playground in? As Harold is looking for Londell, he comes across Londell's brother, Jupiter, and two other boys, Bug and Keenan. Bug is hungry, and wants to eat dinner. (p.68) "You'll eat when Londell git here", said Jupiter. "Harold cringed. He remembered what

- Londell said about each of them”. “No Family”. Why do you think that Londell seeks out boys with no families to be his drug runners?
2. Jupiter James keeps telling Harold that he can not stay and wait for Londell. (p70) Keenan points out, “Yo, Joop, they comin’ out already!” “Who’s that? Harold asks nervously”. “Junkies” said Bug. Londell then arrives in his gold Nissan, tossing a brown paper bag to his brother Jupiter, who shoves it down the front of his pants, and telling them, “Get to work. We got a line already”. Harold got in the car with Londell. (p.73) “Harold knew what he was about to do was wrong, that it would break Grandma’s heart, since it went against everything she taught. But there was no escaping the bills and that letter”. With that, Harold asked Londell for a job. “I don’t think I can stand on that corner”, Harold blurted. Londell laughed, “Don’t worry”. “I ain’t gonna put you on the corner – You’re gonna be my delivery boy.” Under the circumstances, how difficult was it to convince Harold to do something that he knew was wrong?
  3. (p.74-75) “Look, Harold. As long as you’re not stupid, you’ll be fine. Just keep your head down and your eyes open. I’ll pay you fifty bucks a day. Shouldn’t take you more than a couple of hours from start to finish”. “Fifty bucks a day! Harold thought with excitement. With that money he realized he could pay for Grandma’s emergency room bill by himself in just a few weeks.” “And to start you off, here’s a little something.” “Londell handed Harold a crisp fifty-dollar bill. For being such a smart kid, and for trusting me.” Londell then drove Harold to his first delivery site. What kind of neighborhood was it in?
  4. Londell sat in his car by the curb, while instructing Harold in how to make his first delivery by walking up to the house, knocking, and asking for Shawn. Shawn will give you \$100, which Harold was to count, before handing over the package of drugs. Were there any problems with Harold’s first delivery? What was Harold thinking when he had finished?

## CHAPTER 6

1. When Harold got home he was smiling to himself. (p.78) “For the first time in weeks, he felt like he was in control”. “Besides, it wasn’t like he was selling drugs to kids. And once he made enough money, he could quit and go back to a normal job”. At what point does someone “make enough money”?
2. Shortly after Londell drops Harold off near his home Harold is confronted by Cindy, who asks (p.79) “Where were you? Grandma Rose said you were working at SuperFoods, but I went there, and they told me you didn’t work there anymore.” “I quit that job. Me and Mr. Marshall didn’t get along, he lied”. Cindy then asks point blank why Harold is lying. “I saw you get outta Londell’s car. We both know what he does, Harold. Don’t treat me like I’m stupid.” “It’s not what you think, Harold pleaded. He’s not that bad.” Cindy rolled her eyes and said “He’s a drug dealer, Harold! That’s all I need to know.” Is there such a thing as a “good drug dealer”? What would Grandma Rose think?
3. (p.83) What does Harold do with the \$48.20 he earned at the grocery store, and the \$50 he received from Londell?

4. (p.84-85)After school Harold rushes out in order to catch the bus to meet up with Londell. While at his locker Harold is questioned by Darrell Mercer as to why he has had no contact with his friends lately. How does that conversation go?
5. When Harold arrives at 25<sup>th</sup> Street he hears the sound of shattering glass. It is Bug – but what was Bug doing, and why?
6. (p.91)While waiting for Londell, Jupiter and Harold think back to a pleasant time they shared many years earlier in sixth grade. What is one of your favorite memories of years earlier?
7. (p.93)As Londell approaches, Keenan asks Harold, “You Londell’s new delivery boy?” “Yeah, said Harold”. “Be careful, man”, Keenan whispered. “Of what?” “Of everything, he replied”. What do you think that Keenan knows, that Harold does not?

## CHAPTER 7

1. That day Harold was directed to make two deliveries for Londell. The big difference from the day before was that Londell was not going to drive Harold to the delivery sites. The first address was the same one Harold made the delivery to the night before, Shawn’s house. (p.97)What did Shawn do that was different this time, knowing that Londell was no where in sight? Who else was at the house this time, which was not there the night before? As Harold was leaving, someone else arrived. Who was it, and how did Harold feel as a result?
2. Twenty minutes later Harold was at his second delivery site. (p.100)How was this delivery different from the easy delivery the night before?
3. (p.102)Harold returns the money collected to Londell, but tells him “I don’t wanna go back there”. (p.103)When Harold tries to quit, “Suddenly, Londell grabbed Harold’s shirt and yanked him across the car. Harold’s head smacked into the console, and then he heard something click. Before he could react, he felt a stabbing pain under his chin. Londell was leaning over him, holding a switchblade at his throat”. “Where you think you’re going”, Londell growled. “You owe me, boy. Didn’t I help you when you didn’t have no money? Didn’t I give you a job when you came looking for it? You belong to me now. There ain’t no quittin’”. How do you think Harold is going to be able to break away from Londell? Have you ever been disappointed when you were unable to see the mistakes you were about to make, before you made them?
4. (p.107)Harold is most concerned about the youngest boy working for Londell, Bug. Harold makes Bug promise that he will never return to Londell. “He pays him in cheeseburgers, Harold thought angrily. He told me he looked after Bug, but he’s using him, just like me”. What do you think will happen to Bug?

## CHAPTER 8

1. When Harold finally made it back home he found grandma lying on the kitchen floor. Who was kneeling beside her? Unsure whether he should call an ambulance, Harold rushes down the hall to get Mr. Harris. Mr. Harris correctly assessed that grandma had collapsed in part due to diabetic low blood sugars. Mr.

- Harris later promised to go with Harold to pick up more groceries tomorrow. After Mr. Harris leaves Cindy asks Harold where he had been. (p.113)“You know, Harold, I don’t even know who you are anymore”. “You changed since you started talking to Londell. I don’t even know what to think now.” “I’m still the same, Cindy, he managed to say”. How can Harold tell Cindy that he is the same, when he knows that he has become a drug dealer?
2. Later that afternoon Harold goes to the store with Mr. Harris. As they left the store Harold saw a familiar gold Nissan parked at the curb in front of them, Londell sitting in the driver’s seat. (p.116)Mr. Harris seemed to know something was wrong. Mr. Harris put down the groceries and walked over to the car. What happened when Mr. Harris confronted Londell?

## CHAPTER 9

1. Monday afternoon Harold waits for Cindy at her locker to tell her again that he had not changed. Harold gave Cindy money for the bandages she bought for grandma, but Cindy refuses to take the money. Why does Cindy refuse the money? “Harold you need to stop. You gotta tell someone before you get hurt”. Why is it so difficult for Harold to stop?
2. Later that day Harold is given three packages to deliver. The first one is again to Shawn’s house. What happened at Shawn’s?
3. After Shawn refused to pay, and took the drugs, and beat up Harold, Harold ran home. He is beat up so badly that he locks himself in the bathroom to clean up. When he comes out of the bathroom what does he find grandma is doing?
4. (p.128)Harold realized that Londell said, “I now here you live. I know where you go to school. I know you ain’t got no daddy to run home to”. For that reason Harold returns to the playground to report the loss of the drugs and money to Londell, before Londell has a chance to come looking for Harold at grandma’s apartment. Why is Londell going to punish Harold for something that his user customer, Shawn, did?
5. (p.132)Londell tells his brother, “Come here, Joop. Teach this boy a lesson”. “Harold’s body was trembling, ‘Please!’ he cried, covering his head. ‘I’ll do anything you want!’” “Shut your mouth boy! “Joop, get over here, Now!” “Joop shook his head and backed away, his eyes wild with fear. ‘Londell, c’mon man! I don’t wanna hit him!’” “Do it!” Londell ordered. How do you defy someone, when you know that what they want to do is wrong?

## CHAPTER 10

1. (p.133)Harold narrowly escapes a severe beating at the hands of Londell or his brother Jupiter when a car screeches to a stop behind them. Mr. Harris landed a crushing punch into Londell’s cheek. “Londell tried to stand, reaching for something in his belt, but Mr. Harris hit him again. Londell sprawled forward, and a small black handgun slipped from his fingers and slid a few feet from where Harold and Jupiter were standing. Joop! Londell roared, trying to escape. Get the

- gun!” (p.134) “Do what you gotta do! Londell boomed”. What should Jupiter do? What will Jupiter do?
2. As the police sirens near, Harold tells Jupiter (p.134) “Don’t do it, Joop. We used to be in school together, bro. We still can be.” Jupiter stared into Harold’s face. “He’s my brother”. “Shoot him!” Londell said as he struggled to break Mr. Harris’s grip. The siren grew louder. How does this confrontation end?
  3. As Harold was driven home by Mr. Harris he asks, “How did you find me?” How did Mr. Harris know where to find Harold?
  4. Harold is welcomed home by both Grandma and Cindy. Grandma says that she now realizes how worried Harold had been over the hospital and emergency room bills. (p.138) “Harold those hospital bills, most of them are covered by our insurance. And whatever’s left, I’ll manage to pay it off over time.” Harold asks about the letter concerning the naming of a guardian. How is that matter resolved?
  5. After Mr. Harris agrees to be Harold’s guardian, Harold is stunned. (p.140) “I-I don’t know what to say” Harold stammered, his eyes welling up. “Just learn from this Harold, Mr. Harris replied, opening the door to leave. **You are worth fighting for, son. Don’t you ever forget that**”. In your opinion, are you worth fighting for? Have there been people in your life who believed in you, and were willing to fight for you, regardless of what troubles you may have gotten yourself into?

What did you think of this book, and why?

### **ALTERNATIVE ENDING:**

Go back to pages 134-135 where Londell is being held by Mr. Harris, and the police cars are getting nearer. Londell’s gun lies on the ground at the feet of his brother Jupiter. “Get the gun!” Londell yells. “Jupiter stared into Harold’s face, studied his bloodied nose and swollen eyes. He shook his head sadly. ‘It’s all wrong. It ain’t supposed to be like this. He’s my brother’”. “Shoot him!” Londell yelled. Londell struggled to break Mr. Harris’s grip. The siren grew louder”.

At this point I would like for you to write an alternative ending for this story, something that is different from how this author ended the story. Please remember that there is no right or wrong ending, you can write whatever you wish. Be creative. Have fun. When you are finished I will show you an alternative ending that I wrote.

**ALTERNATIVE ENDING**  
Written by IYC Tutor Byron Eden

Jupiter stood there with fear written all across his face. He was raised to know that fear is a sign of weakness. Londell was his brother...he was family...BUT Jupiter could easily recall the many times that Londell had not acted like family. How many times had Londell taken advantage of his family of drug runners, like Harold, Keenan, Bug, and even Joop himself? Everyone had been cut or injured by Londell over the past few weeks, as he attempted to “teach them a lesson”. Jupiter had seen too many lives destroyed by drugs – his mother, his father, his brother, himself, Keenan, Bug, Harold, and countless junkies that he sold to.

Jupiter’s thoughts were torn away when Londell again screamed “**SHOOT HIM**” as the police sirens came even closer. Just then Londell twisted and partially freed himself from Mr. Harris’s grip. Londell reached for the gun, which was now inches away.

In an instant, Jupiter took a small step forward and picked up the gun. He aimed very carefully...and pulled the trigger.

Londell let out a blood curdling scream as he realized that his brother Jupiter had just shot him in the foot. “**NO!**” screamed Jupiter. “All you care about is yourself – not me – not Harold – not Keenan, and not Bug. I’m sick of it, and I don’t want to be part of your criminal life any longer”. With that Jupiter put the gun down at his feet, and raised his hands as the police officers arrived at the scene.