

A study guide prepared by IYC Tutor Byron Eden

Blood is Thicker

By Paul Langan & D.M. Blackwell

Make a list of all words used in this book that you do not know the meaning of. Bring your list of words 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. The main character in this book is Hakeem Randall, who recently learned that he and his family will have to move from their home in California to Detroit, due to Hakeem's father trying to recover from cancer. As a result, Hakeem must move away from his old friends at Bluford High School, and his girlfriend, Darcy. (p.1) "If there was anything he could do to stop his family from moving away, he would have done it. But the decision was out of his hands." Has there ever been a time in your life when important decisions were being made in your life, yet you felt that you had no control over the matter, and the decisions were out of your hands?
2. (p.2) The medical crisis facing Hakeem and his family had an impact on all of the members of the family. This is another example of situations being out of their hands. Can you think of times when your actions had an effect on other members of your family, or when their actions had an effect on you?
3. (p.5) "Hakeem read the words from his notebook. He had written them when his father first mentioned the move to Detroit. It seemed as if years had passed, not weeks." Have you ever had a time in your life when time seemed to pass much faster than it really was? How about a time when life seems to slow down, and things just drag on and on?
4. (p.6) For years Hakeem had been singing and playing his guitar. Even when he wasn't singing, he was always jotting lyrics in his notebook for songs he might sing one day. "In his songs, he could control everything." Do you have anything that you do to escape the problems of everyday life?
5. (p.7) While on the flight to Detroit Hakeem thinks back to a time years ago when he and his cousin, Savon, were picked on by some local bullies in Detroit. "Thanks Wimpy and Blimpy, the teens mocked as they strolled down the street." Do you have any memories of being bullied by someone at a very early age?
6. Before the move, Hakeem's best friend Cooper Hodden offered to let Hakeem move in and stay with Cooper and his family. (p.10) "Stay with us, Hak! My mom says we got room for you, he insisted. Besides, she likes you more than she likes me." As much as Hakeem wanted to stay in California with Cooper and his family, he had to turn down the offer because "he couldn't abandon his family". Family ties become stronger than friendships. Can you think of times when this has been true in your life?

7. When Hakeem and his family arrive in Detroit, to live with Uncle James, Hakeem's mother comments to Hakeem's cousin, Savon that he has grown into quite a young man. Savon responds "that is what happens when you don't see somebody for ten years". (p.13) Hakeem's mom responds to this comment by saying "Ten years is too long for a family not to see each other". Do you have any family members that you don't see often enough, and it seems like too long to you?
8. (p.14-15) When Hakeem is reacquainted with his cousin Savon, some comments are made that are not very kind. Savon says "I guess we can't all be as perfect as you, huh cuz, Savon said. There was an icy bite to his voice, and he ignored Hakeem's outstretched hand". "But it's all good 'cause while you spent years bein' everybody's favorite son, I spent some time hittin' the weights." Why do you think there is this resentment between the two cousins, when they are just seeing each other for the first time in many years?
9. (p.17) Hakeem tells his Aunt Lorraine how much he missed her, and she says "I missed you too baby. It has been too long. Way too long. I keep telling myself that all this trouble is **a blessing in disguise**". Have you ever had a time in your life when something very painful for you to accept turned out to be something that was helpful to you in some way?

CHAPTER 2

1. (p.20-21) After moving in with his cousin, Hakeem and Savon are sitting on the porch when Savon sees his "homeboys" approaching in the street. Savon joins his friends on the street while Hakeem remains on the porch. The group talks about something that is planned for Friday night. One member of the group says "I just hope we get out before the cops come." What do you think these boys have planned?
2. At dinner that night Hakeem's family learns that Uncle James is almost never home for dinner, as he works very long hours. (p.24) "James is working late tonight because there was a break in near the store a few nights ago", Aunt Lorraine says. Savon suggests that his father needs a guard dog, but Savon's mother says, "Hush your mouth boy. You always talkin' nonsense. He don't need no guard dog down there, but what he could use right now is some extra help". (p.25) Savon responds "Mom, I told you. I ain't got time for the store right now". Why do you think that Savon is unable or unwilling to help his father at the store? Is it fair that Savon does not help his father, yet Hakeem's father volunteers to have Hakeem help his uncle at the store?
3. On page 29 Hakeem begins to stutter once again. Why?
4. (p.31) Later that evening Hakeem grabbed his guitar and journal and sat on the back step during sunset. He played a sad melody that matched his mood. Eventually he meets a girl who lives next door, Anika. How did they meet?
5. (p.32) "Hakeem had not been playing a song. He'd been playing his private feelings". What does the author mean by this comment?

6. (p.32) Anika tells Hakeem “Don’t stop playing. It’s really nice”. “Hakeem blushed. Knowing that she had been watching him made him suddenly feel naked”. How does being naked make us sometimes feel different from when we are not naked? What does the word vulnerable mean, and how could it be used in this example?

CHAPTER 3

1. In Chapter 3 Hakeem wakes up and goes downstairs where he meets his father and Uncle James. Hakeem is asked to go with Uncle James to help him out at work. (p.40) “Hakeem knew he didn’t have a choice”. Why does Hakeem feel that he has no choice in the matter, and must help out his Uncle James?
2. (p.44-45) When they arrive at Uncle James’s furniture store, Uncle James asks Hakeem to do something that makes Hakeem very uncomfortable. What is it that Uncle James wants Hakeem to do? Have you ever been asked to do something that you didn’t want to do, but felt that you had to do?
3. (p.47) When Hakeem arrives at the dining room his cousin Savon says “Hey, cuz, you gonna take my seat at the dinner table too? (p.48) Don’t act surprised. You’re already takin’ everything else”. What does Savon mean by this comment?

CHAPTER 4

1. The next day, Hakeem is awakened by his Uncle James who wants to leave early for work. (p.51) Why? What had happened?
2. Uncle James is anxious for Hakeem to get a chance to talk to Savon – and tells Hakeem to take the next morning off, in hopes that Hakeem and Savon will get to know each other better. (p. 54) What does Hakeem think about this idea?
3. When Savon gets home he goes upstairs in silence. When Hakeem went upstairs to get his guitar he found the door locked. What do you think Savon was doing in his room with the door locked? (p.58) “I need some privacy right now”.
4. (p.59) The author has a very colorful way of describing Hakeem’s frustrations. “Outside on the back step, Hakeem let his frustration bleed through his fingers into the strings of his guitar. Slowly the pain in his head eased, and his anger transformed into music, which dissipated into the evening air like steam. The guitar allowed him to tell the truth his family didn’t seem to understand, that he was scared for his father, that he missed his friends, that he wanted to go home, that he didn’t know how to deal with Savon. Music and his journal were the only places he didn’t have to be strong or silent”. Do you have any **non-verbal** ways of expressing yourself or your emotions?
5. Anika once again hears Hakeem playing his guitar and suggests that they go out for pizza. They talk about Anika’s plans to move to California. (p.64) She tells him, “And just in case you were wondering about me and Savon, we were together a while ago, but that’s over”. Having just been told this, as they were walking home Anika and Hakeem see Savon walking toward them. (p.65) Savon makes a comment “I’m just surprised my cousin’s a player, that’s all. What about Darcy, cuz?” How did Savon know anything about Darcy?

CHAPTER 5

1. (p.68-69) Hakeem wonders how Savon knew about Darcy. What does he find when he goes up to the bedroom that he shares with his cousin, Savon?
2. (p.69) “Savon had read his private writing!” “I can’t believe he read my journal”. Have you ever felt that someone had violated your space, or your trust? Have you ever violated someone else’s trust in this way?
3. (p.69) Having felt betrayed, Hakeem opens Savon’s closet. “Now let’s see what you’re hiding”. Was it right for Hakeem to go through Savon’s closet? If you were Hakeem, would you have done it?
4. (p.71) “Along the back wall of Savon’s closet Hakeem discovered an enormous stack of hip hop CDs. It was the biggest collection he had ever seen outside of a music store”. Hakeem wondered how Savon could afford so much music. How do you think that Savon got all of this music?
5. (p.71) While going through Savon’s closet Hakeem is interrupted by his mother knocking on the bedroom door, to announce that Hakeem had received a phone call from his friend Cooper back in California. (p.74) What does Cooper tell Hakeem about Hakeem’s old girlfriend, Darcy?
6. (p.73) While talking with Cooper on the phone Savon comes home and immediately goes upstairs. (p.75) When Hakeem gets off the phone and goes upstairs to the bedroom what does he find?
7. Hakeem woke up in the middle of the night at 3:07am to observe his cousin, Savon, climbing in the bedroom window. Hakeem now suspects that Savon is involved in the robberies taking place in the neighborhood. Do you think that Hakeem’s suspicion is correct?
8. When Hakeem wakes up the next morning he tries to figure out what he should do. (p80) He remembered seeing Savon put something in his desk drawer as soon as he crawled through the window last night. When Savon is in the shower Hakeem looks in the desk drawer. What did he find?
9. When Savon returns from the bathroom Hakeem confronts Savon, and harsh words are exchanged. This chapter ends with the two cousins about to engage in a fight. How do you think the fight will end? Remember that Hakeem is taller, but that Savon is much stronger.

CHAPTER 6

1. The fight that breaks out is interrupted by Uncle James. At one point he tells his son Savon, that “I am embarrassed to call you my son”. (p87) “The words echoed in Hakeem’s mind. They were like weapons, more harmful than fists”. Have you ever had anyone say something to you that was very hurtful – more so than if you had been hit? Have you every said anything to someone else which was more hurtful than if you had hit that person?

2. (p.87) Hakeem's dad can see how difficult the situation is for Hakeem, living with relatives in Detroit. He tells his son, "But if I learned anything since I got sick, it's that life is too short for fightin'... We don't need to waste our time making it worse, especially not with the people in our family". What do you think of these words?
3. Hakeem tried to apologize for starting the fight, but Savon ignored him by putting a walkman on and turning it up loud. Why do you think that Savon did not want to talk with Hakeem, or accept his apology?

CHAPTER 7

1. Hakeem knows that Savon has plans for Friday night, and that it probably involves something illegal. Why doesn't he tell someone?
2. (p.103) Hakeem calls Anika and agrees to come over for her guitar lesson. Anika tells Hakeem about her plans to move to California, and asks Hakeem to come with her. (p.107) How does Hakeem answer Anika when she asks for him to leave Detroit and with her and return to California?
3. When Hakeem returns home he finds his father and Uncle James are still up. Uncle James talks about Anika, but says "she's trouble". Have you ever been close with someone, only to find that your other friends or relatives do not approve of your friend? Who do you trust, them, or your own instincts?
4. When Hakeem goes upstairs to go to bed he finds that Savon has again climbed out the window, and left a note for Hakeem that read "Don't Say a Word". How many suspicions does it take before Hakeem should step forward and express his concerns to his relatives?

CHAPTER 8

1. Hakeem woke up the next morning to find Savon in bed, but a new pair of black boots and a stack of new CD's on his desk. These items raise Hakeem's suspicions. How about now, does Hakeem finally have enough concern to tell someone about Savon?
2. Hakeem realizes that he probably left his notebook at Anika's house the night before. Have you ever lost or misplaced something that was very important to you? How did you feel as you try to find what is missing?
3. Hakeem and his family finally get the good news that his father's cancer does not appear to have returned. (p.119) Why is it that Hakeem has a difficult time being happy with this great news?
4. Hakeem goes over to Anika's house in an attempt to get his notebook that he left there. What does he find instead when he enters Anika's unlocked house? (p.121-25)
5. This chapter ends with the statement "Hakeem resigned himself to a simple undeniable fact: he had never felt more alone". Has there been a time in your life when you have never felt more alone, or abandoned. Go back to Chapter 2, question 6 about feeling naked. How is feeling vulnerable similar to these feelings of being alone or helpless?

CHAPTER 9

1. This chapter takes a HUGE turn of events when Hakeem wakes up at 12:15 on Friday night to hear that his cousin Savon has once again climbed through the bedroom window. Where do you think Savon is going?
2. Hakeem had been so wrong about his cousin, Savon. Have you ever found that your impressions of someone were also very wrong? Has there been a time when someone else's impressions of you were proven to be very wrong?

CHAPTER 10

1. As the two families argue with each other, no one seems to be willing to listen. Half of communication is talking, and half is listening. What is it that keeps them from doing things that they would later regret?
2. (p.150) Hakeem receives a phone call from California advising him that his former girlfriend Darcy's grandmother had just died. Hakeem desperately wants to travel back to California to be with and comfort Darcy, but there is no money to afford a plane ticket. (p151) Where does the money come from?

What did you think of this book, and why?

ENDING COMMENT

The authors make a common mistake in society, when they keep referring to the crimes being committed as robberies. Legally there is a big difference between a robbery, a burglary, and a larceny (theft). We will discuss the differences in class. In this book the authors should have described the crimes being committed in the middle of the night as burglaries, not robberies.

ALTERNATIVE ENDING:

Go back to page 129 of this book, where Hakeem has followed his cousin after he climbed out of the window on Friday night, and is convinced that Savon and his friends are about to commit a crime. "Hakeem couldn't believe his eyes. His cousin and his friends were going to rob someone's business. Right now. They were ready to break in through the back of a building just as they had done at Mr. Sung's store. Hakeem had to do something. He looked for a pay phone to call home. None was in sight".

At this point in time in the story, you are being asked to be the author. Write an alternative ending that is different from how this author ended this 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

“Hakeem couldn’t believe his eyes. His cousin and his friends were going to rob someone’s business. Right now. They were ready to break in through the back of a building just as they had done at Mr. Sung’s store. Hakeem had to do something. He looked for a pay phone to call home. None was in sight”.

Hakeem huddled behind a dumpster trying desperately to think of the location of the last pay phone that he had seen. He knew that he had seen one somewhere, but where? As he quietly stood there he was startled when, in a flash, floodlights came on and a booming voice was heard over a public address system announcing “THIS IS THE POLICE! PUT YOUR HANDS UP!” Hakeem was grateful that the police had somehow been contacted, even without his phone call. Hakeem couldn’t help but wonder how the police knew about the planned Friday night robbery.

The police SWAT team moved forward and easily arrested Savon, Tariq, and the rest of the gang. Hakeem was too far back to see and hear everything, but he could make out that handcuffs were put on all of them. When things settled down a bit Hakeem was able to hear an officer speaking on the police radio. “Dispatch, we are 10-15 at the stake out. Notify the watch commander, and have him let that girl Anika know that her suspicions were right on target. I will put through the paperwork so she can claim the reward on the arrest of these thugs.”

Hearing the police officer use the word “thug” made Hakeem think back to when Anika called the boys in the neighborhood thugs, and saw that Savon had the word thug written on a piece of paper on his desk. Uncle James was not going to be happy to learn all about the criminal activity that his son had been involved with, but at least he would finally realize why Savon was so distant, and unwilling to spend any time helping out in the furniture store. Hakeem couldn’t help but ask himself if maybe things would have turned out different if Uncle James had been more loving, and less demanding of Savon.

What a week this had been! Despite all of the drama with Savon, Hakeem was able to silently pause and give thanks that his dad was cancer free, and on the road to recovery. Hopefully it would not be too long before the entire family could move back to California. Back to Bluford high school. Back to his friends, Cooper and Darcy. As these thoughts drifted through his mind, a smile began to spread across Hakeem’s face.