

Before You Read

Slam, Dunk, & Hook

Connect to the Poem

What do you like about sports? Which games do you prefer, and why? Would you rather be playing a game or watching others play?

Write a Journal Entry Record your feelings about sports. Describe a game you enjoy and a game you dislike. Use a chart like the one below to organize your thoughts. Then, explain your feelings. Do you prefer to play sports or to watch them? Which do you value more—fierce competition between teams or intense loyalty among team members? Why?

I enjoy _____ because ...	I dislike _____ because ...

Build Background

Basketball was invented in 1891 by James Naismith, an instructor in physical education who lived in Springfield, Massachusetts. In need of an indoor game for the winter months, Naismith used a soccer ball and two peach baskets, one hung at each end of a gym. The rules Naismith made up for that game form the basis of today's game.

Meet Yusef Komunyakaa



"Students often have such a lofty idea of what a poem is, and I want them to realize that their own lives are where the poetry comes from."

—Yusef Komunyakaa

Poet and Educator The poet and educator Yusef Komunyakaa (ū' sēf kō mun yā' kā) uses his Louisiana childhood and his time in Vietnam as an Army correspondent as resources for the material in his poetry. A winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1994, Komunyakaa writes poems on a wide variety of subjects, including jazz, racial prejudice, and war.

Yusef Komunyakaa was born in 1947.

LOG
ON



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Author Search For more about Yusef Komunyakaa, go to glencoe.com and enter QuickPass code GL29763u2.

Set Purposes for Reading

BQ BIG Question

As you read, ask yourself, how does the structure and rhythm of this poem help to recreate the feel of an actual game of basketball?

Literary Element Metaphor and Simile

Figurative language is language that is used for descriptive effect, often to imply an idea indirectly. Expressions of figurative language are not literally true. They express a truth beyond the literal level. Two of the most common types of figurative language are **similes** and **metaphors**.

- A **simile** is an expression that uses *like* or *as* to compare two seemingly unlike things. The phrase “Elena runs like the wind” is a simile suggesting that Elena runs quickly.
- A **metaphor** is an expression that compares two seemingly unlike things. In contrast to similes, metaphors imply a comparison instead of stating it directly. Metaphors do not contain the words *like* or *as*. Take, for example, the sentence “Seth is a cheetah on the racetrack.” Seth is not literally a cheetah. The author uses the metaphor to suggest that Seth runs quickly.

Similes and metaphors are great writing tools because they add colorful description with a minimum of words. Similes, metaphors, and other kinds of figurative language are especially prominent in poetry. As you read this poem, look for similes and metaphors. Ask yourself, what do the two objects of the comparison have in common? What new insight do I gain by thinking about the comparison?

Reading Strategy Visualize

When you **visualize**, you create pictures in your mind. For example, while reading nonfiction, you may picture the steps in a certain process or envision a place that the writer is describing. As you read fiction and poetry, you may picture what a character or setting looks like or imagine the actions that take place.

Visualizing is important because it makes a selection more vivid—it helps you “see” people, places, and things. If you visualize while you read, you will understand and remember the poem better.

As you read, imagine what the characters look like, and try to picture the setting. Pay attention to the details that the writer includes. Make sketches of what you “see” in your mind.

Learning Objectives

For pages 202–207

In studying this text, you will focus on the following objectives:

Literary Study: Analyzing simile and metaphor.

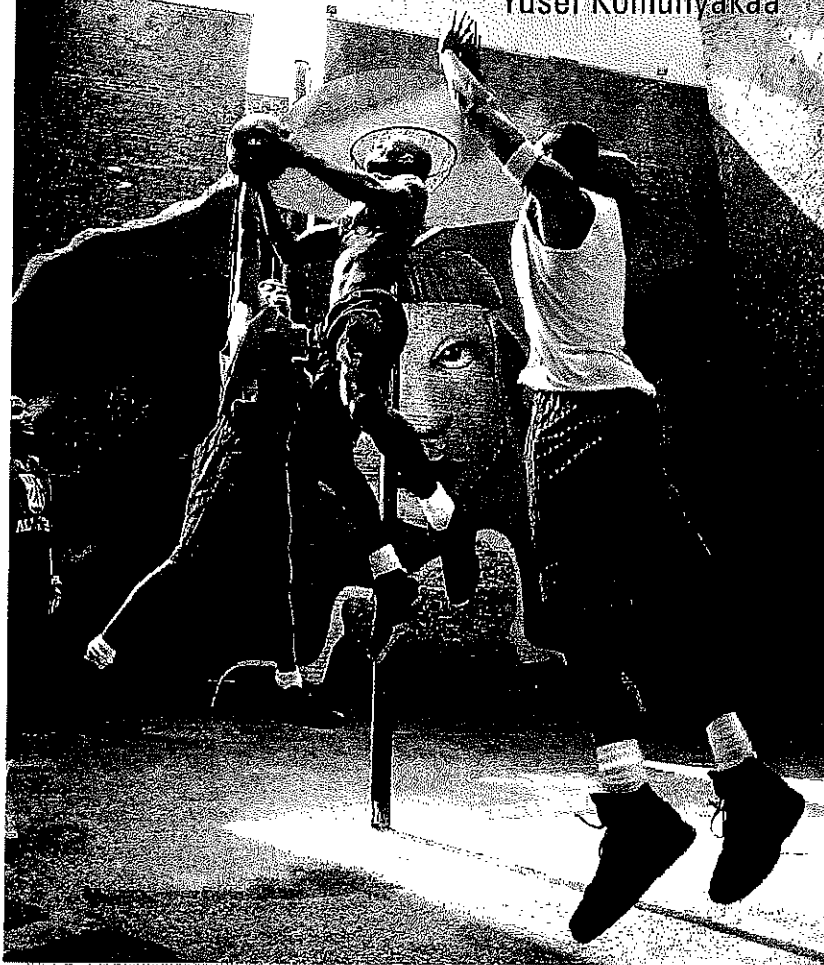
Reading: Visualizing.

TRY IT

Visualize With a partner, pick a single sporting event. Then, working individually, list everything that comes to your mind as you picture the scene. After a few minutes of writing, stop and compare and contrast your list with your partner’s. Which elements are similar and which are different?

Slam, Dunk, & Hook

Yusef Komunyakaa



Fast breaks. Lay ups. With Mercury's¹
Insignia on our sneakers,
We outmaneuvered³ the footwork
Of bad angels. Nothing but a hot
5 Swish of strings like silk
Ten feet out. In the roundhouse⁶

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- 1 In ancient Roman mythology, *Mercury* was the swift messenger of the gods. He was often portrayed wearing winged sandals.
- 3 If you *outmaneuvered* someone, you used clever movements to defeat that person.
- 6 *Roundhouse* is a slang term for sweeping movement—in this case, wide, swinging arm movements.

Labyrinth° our bodies
Created, we could almost
Last forever, poised in midair
10 Like storybook sea monsters.
A high note hung there,
A long second. Off
The rim. We'd corkscrew
Up & dunk balls that exploded
15 The skullcap of hope & good
Intention. Bug-eyed, lanky
All hands & feet . . . sprung rhythm.
We were metaphysical° when girls
Cheered on the sidelines.
20 Tangled up in a falling
Muscles were a bright motor
Double-flashing to the metal hoop
Nailed to our oak.
When Sonny Boy's mama died
25 He played nonstop all day, so hard
Our backboard splintered.
Glistening with sweat, we jibed°
& rolled the ball off our
Fingertips. Trouble
30 Was there slapping a blackjack°
Against an open palm.
Dribble, drive to the inside, feint°,
& glide like a sparrow hawk.
Lay ups. Fast breaks.
35 We had moves we didn't know
We had. Our bodies spun
On swivels of bone & faith,
Through a lyric slipknot
Of joy, & we knew we were
40 Beautiful & dangerous.

7 A *labyrinth* is a confusing, complicated arrangement.

18 Here, *metaphysical* means that the players seemed to go beyond the limits of the physical world.

27 To *jibe* is to be in harmony with one another.

30 A *blackjack* is a weighted, flexible, leather-covered weapon.

32 A *feint* is movement that is intended to "fake out" an opponent.

1

Figurative Language What figure of speech appears in these lines? What two things are being compared in line 21?

2

Visualize This simile compares a player to a sparrow hawk, a bird that flies at high speeds and changes directions quickly. How does this image help you visualize the player's movements?

3

BQ **BIG Question**

How might a thing be both beautiful and dangerous? What quality does this description suggest to you?

After You Read

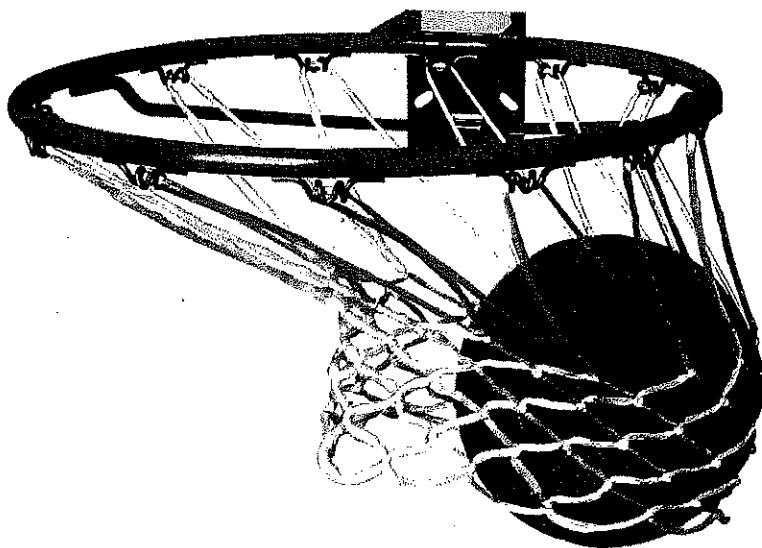
Respond and Think Critically

1. Summarize the actions described in "Slam, Dunk, & Hook."
[Summarize]
2. Why is "Slam, Dunk, & Hook" a good title for this poem? Explain your answer. [Analyze]
3. According to "Slam, Dunk, & Hook," team sports are dramatic, emotional, and exhilarating. Do you agree or disagree? Explain. [Evaluate]
4. What is Komunyakaa saying about the connection between friendship and basketball? Support your answer with details from the poem. [Interpret]
5. What overall message about team sports does "Slam, Dunk, & Hook" express? Explain. [Conclude]
6. **BQ** **BIG Question** Which sections of this poem did you find most powerful? Tell why you found the sections effective. [Evaluate]

Academic Vocabulary

Each member of a basketball team **contributes** to its success.

In the preceding sentence, *contributes* means "has a part in a group's effort." Think about a time when you contributed to a group's success. What did you contribute to the group? Explain.



TIP

Summarizing

- To summarize a poem, write a sentence for every few thoughts or events described in the poem.
- Remember that the end of a line in poetry is not necessarily the end of a sentence or thought.
- In your own words, retell the main points of the poem in the order that they are presented.

FOLDABLES Study Organizer

Keep track of your ideas about the **BIG Question** in your unit Foldable.



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Selection Resources

For Selection Quizzes, eFlashcards, and Reading-Writing Connection activities, go to glencoe.com and enter QuickPass code GL29763u2.

