



Walter Dean Myers shakes the hand of a young reader at a Read Across America event.

# Ordinary Heroes

Walter Dean Myers writes stories that honestly reflect the lives of kids today.

By Robert Lerosé

**W**hen Walter Dean Myers was growing up, he was frequently in trouble. He got into fights with the other kids at school. He talked back to his teachers and was often made to sit in the back of the classroom by himself. But he loved to read. He would bury himself in books and he would dream.

Today, he is the author of more than 100 books, most of them for

children and teenagers. "I care about writing for young people because I remember how much I needed help and guidance at that time in my life," he says in his book *Just Write: Here's How!* Myers was named the National Ambassador for Young People's Literature in 2012. He travels the country, encouraging kids of all ages to read, read, read.

## Honest Words

Even at a young age, Myers had a way with words. He could amuse himself for hours by writing and drawing in his notebooks. One of his poems appeared on the first page of his school's magazine when he was in fifth grade.

Myers was raised in Harlem, a largely black neighborhood in New York City. As a boy, he loved

observing people in his community. But he couldn't find many books that told the stories of the ordinary people he saw in real life.

So he chose to write the kinds of stories he wishes he had when he was growing up—stories that honestly reflect the lives of kids today. "Some kids feel abandoned or hopeless," Myers says, "but they'll pick up a book of mine and find themselves or their families."

Where does he get his ideas? Some ideas for stories come from his childhood. Myers also spends a lot of time talking to young people to find out what's going on in their lives.

### Fun Work

It takes a lot of work to write as many books as Myers does, but he loves it. He is up by five o'clock in the morning. He works at home in a small office that used to be his son's bedroom.

Myers first writes an outline for every book. He calls this prewriting. He imagines what the

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story will be, jotting down ideas in a notebook. To make sure there's enough action and dialogue for a good story, he comes up with 30 scenes. He writes a short description of each scene in his notebook.

He also cuts out pictures of real people and pins them on his office walls. He looks at those pictures to get ideas for characters. Once he knows what the story will be and who the characters are, he begins to write the whole book. He writes five pages a day on his computer.

Myers usually works on three

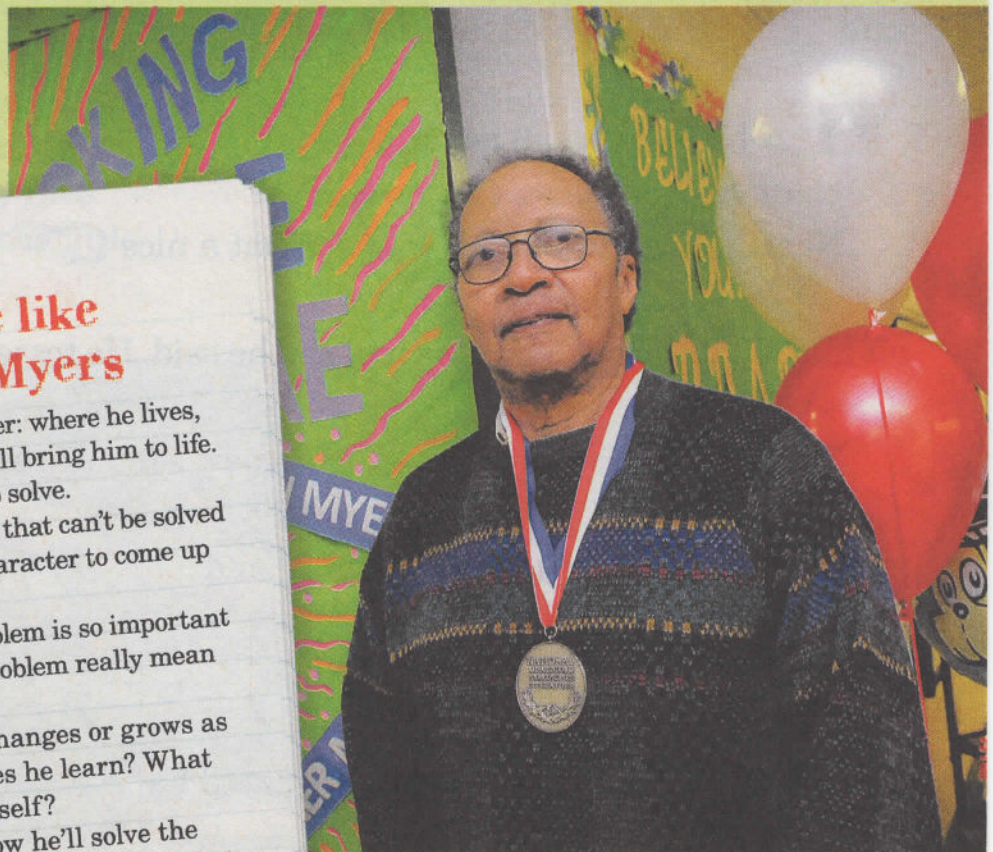
books at once. When he's not prewriting or writing a book, he might be rewriting something he has already completed. Then he'll send the story to his agent or editor. They may make suggestions for the story. After these final changes are made, the book is published and makes its way to bookstores and libraries.

By that time, he'll be hard at work on his next book.

"I want to do the best that I can with my writing," Myers says. "I don't have a need to do anything else." 

### How to Write like Walter Dean Myers

1. Tell us about the main character: where he lives, what he does, anything that will bring him to life. Then give him a big problem to solve.
2. Show why it's a tough problem that can't be solved easily. Make it hard for the character to come up with a simple solution.
3. Explain why solving this problem is so important to the character. Make the problem really mean something to the character.
4. Tell us how the character changes or grows as the story unfolds. What does he learn? What does he discover about himself?
5. Let the character decide how he'll solve the problem. Show what actions he'll take or what he plans to do.
6. Tell us what happens to the main character and how everything turns out in the end.



Walter Dean Myers says that when he was a child, books were his only friends.