

## Background about the Book – The Moves Make the Man

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Jerome Foxworthy, 13, ace student, first black in an all white school and a basketball fanatic, narrates this story of his friendship with Bix. Bix's game is baseball but Jerome recognizes in his skill the same passion and technical accuracy that he himself has in his sport. When Jerome and Bix end up in the same cooking class, a friendship begins. It is clear from the beginning that Bix is deeply disturbed. Eventually it becomes clear that his mother is in an institution. This is an exquisite portrait of Jerome, a bright confident loner and Bix, distant and frightened and the fragile friendship that develops between them.

[www.carolhurst.com](http://www.carolhurst.com).

## About the Author

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### Biography

Bruce Brooks, one of today's most acclaimed writers of young adult fiction, was born in Washington, DC on September 23, 1950, but spent most of his childhood in North Carolina. The child of divorced parents, he was constantly adapting to two different lifestyles, urban and rural southern. Frequently changing schools in the middle of the school year made him overcome his shyness because he had to make friends quickly. His childhood provided him with rich material for his young adult fiction.

Brooks graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1972 and from the University of Iowa Writer's Workshop in 1980. His work as a reporter for magazines and newspapers as well as numerous hobbies and interests --- such as music, nature study, sports, and reading --- all show up in his stories.

Bruce Brooks' first novel, *The Moves Make the Man*, started the author's long-term commitment to young adult writing that crosses over into adult enjoyment.

Bruce Brooks started writing in the fifth grade, and his first books were comics. As the drawings got smaller and the text predominated, he decided that maybe his talents lay more in writing than in drawing. Brooks says that he writes stories about families --- and features young heroes and heroines. "Teenage people usually know and understand a great deal more of the truth in any situation than the adults around them can assess."

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Brooks has the unique ability to be able to plan his plots and the interactions of his characters before he sits down to write a first draft. Thus, the book is about half-finished in his head by the time he starts writing.

He has won many awards, among them being Best Book of 1984 and 1986 by School Library Journal, Notable book of the year New York Times (1984), the Horn Book Fanfare Honor List book (1987), and a Newbery Honor from ALA (1985).

*teenreads.com*

## Reviews – The Moves Make the Man

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“Brooks uses basketball and its inherent deceptions (you've got to know how to fake to win) as a backboard for bigger questions about truth, lies, and the flexible nature of honesty.” *Baltimore City Paper*

“...contains many layers, all peeling away, to reveal how the metaphor of the basketball game follows through in life.” *teenreads.com*

“Readers will be drawn (to this) story by the brilliant sports writing and by the trenchant examination of a friendship with a boy in trouble.” *ALA Booklist*

Brooks' fine first novel has a basketball theme and plenty of action but is no more about basketball than, say, Mark Harris' *Bang the Drum Slowly* is about baseball. The sport is merely the vehicle for delivering a serious story about friendship and madness. The main character, Jerome Foxworthy, is a black junior high student in Wilmington, North Carolina, in the early 1960s. He is also brilliant, and an athlete of great talent who is extraordinarily cocksure of his abilities, perhaps too much so, on all accounts, but readers will accept it because the story depends on it. Jerome is the first black to attend his junior high, and the first chapters give readers an interesting account of middle class black life in a Southern city as a new era dawns. The real story develops further along when Jerome comes into contact with Bix Rivers, a white athlete, to whom Jerome is unaccountably attracted. Bix is mentally ill. He can tolerate no lies or deceit in life or in sports, and his definitions of these are disturbingly narrow. Bix's mother is in a mental institution, and much of the latter part of the novel deals with Jerome's attempts to keep Bix sane through basketball and to resolve the conflict between Bix and his stepfather. The story is not perfect: Jerome is wise well beyond his years; and body language, which plays a humorous part in Jerome's description of his school classes, was barely heard of in the '60s, never mind being taught in classes. This is a difficult story to read, but better readers will enjoy its humor, electric tension and great characters, and their efforts will be well rewarded. The description of the basketball action is simply excellent, but all the writing is top rank. Brooks is, indeed, a major new talent in the YA field. *School Library Journal*

## Read Alikes – The Moves Make the Man

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*Black and White* by Paul Volponi

*When the Finch Rises* by Jack Riggs

*Slam!* By Walter Dean Myers

*Summer Ball* by Mike Lupica

*Danger Zone* by David Klass

*novelistplus.com*

## Discussion Questions: The Moves Make the Man

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1. When Jerome grudgingly attends the baseball game at the beginning of the book, he admits that he “did not want to like anything or anybody. But Bix got me, baby.” What is it about Bix that fascinates Jerome when he first sees him playing baseball?
2. How does Jerome wind up getting the lantern? Do you agree with Jerome’s mother that he should have returned the light, or with Jerome’s brother, who thinks he should keep it? Why?
3. Why does Jerome name the lantern Spin Light? Why does this phrase have special meaning to Bix?
4. As the title states, Jerome believes that “the moves make the man.” Given their actions, what does this tell you about Jerome and about Bix? What about Bix’s parents and Jerome’s mother?
5. Why does Bix have such strong convictions about telling the absolute truth? Consider the incident between Bix and his mother. Do you think that telling the truth is always the best thing, or are there occasions when it would be better to lie? Explain your answer.
6. Beginning halfway through the game against his stepfather, occurring again at dinner at Jerome’s house, and coming to a peak with his mother in the hospital, the plot moves from Bix always telling the truth to his using moves and fakes. Why does he undergo this change? In each of the incidents listed above, why does Bix choose to put on moves?
7. What role does basketball play in the relationship between Bix and Jerome? Between Bix and his father? For Jerome by himself?
8. Jerome closes the book by saying, “If nobody else is there to take the fake, then for good or bad a part of your own self will follow it. There are no moves you truly make alone.” What does he mean by this? How do the events in the book lead him to make this conclusion?

*harperchildrens.com*

# GENERAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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The following questions can be applied to any book. You can tweak the questions for your specific book. They can be cut into strips and passed around in a basket to help facilitate discussion.

My favorite part of the book was...

A better title for this book would be...because...

(Name of character) reminds me of myself because...

My least favorite character was...because...

If I were (name of character, -----) I would (wouldn't) have...

(Name of character) reminds me of someone I know because...

I changed my mind about...because...

I would (wouldn't) like to read another book by this author because...

This book made me think...When I finished this book, I still wondered...

This book reminded me of...

I'd like to tell the author...

What happened in this book was very realistic (unrealistic) because...

This book was better (worse) than the movie version because...

When I started reading his book, I thought...

I didn't like...because...

This book made me realize...

If I could talk to (name of character), I would say...

One thing I have noticed about the author's style is...

If I could be any character in the book I would be...because...

I was surprised when...

I think the main thing the writer was trying to say was...

The most important thing about this book is...

I predicted that...

I think the writer must be ...because...

I would change the ending...