

TEACHERS' GUIDE

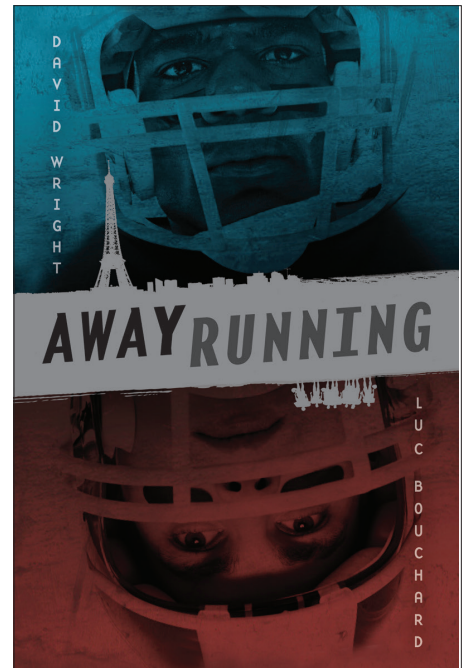
AWAY RUNNING

David Wright and Luc Bouchard

Fiction Ages 12+

Themes: American football, racism, violence, protest, war, grief, Paris, Montreal, college, friendship, team, confrontation, loyalty, disrespect, race riots, Islam

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SUMMARY

Matt and Free discover the dark side of the City of Light.

Matt, a white quarterback from Montreal, Quebec, flies to France (without his parents' permission) to play football and escape family pressure. Freeman, a black football player from San Antonio, Texas, is in Paris on a school trip when he hears about a team playing American football in a rough, low-income suburb called Villeneuve-La-Grande. Matt and Free join the Diablos Rouges and make friends with the other players, who come from many different ethnic groups. Racial tension erupts into riots in Villeneuve when some of their Muslim teammates get in trouble with the police, and Matt and Free have to decide whether to get involved and face the very real risk of arrest and violence.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

David Wright is a writer and teacher of writing. He played American football for the Flash of La Courneuve in suburban Paris before returning to Champaign, Illinois, a home base from where he sets out abroad, most recently to Bahia, Brazil, and Benin, West Africa. Visit www.davidwrightbooks.com for more information.

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QUESTIONS*Before the Book Begins*

1. Looking quickly at the cover of the book, what's your first impression? Look more closely. The cover is set up very strategically, with definite messages about the book's themes implied by the visuals. What do you notice? Explain your thinking.
2. The dedication in the book says, "For Zyed Benna, Bouna Traore and Muhittin Altun...Dead for nothing." Do you know who these people are? Why do you suppose the authors dedicate the book to them? In your opinion, how does a dedication like this at the start of a book influence its reader?

Pages 1–64

1. The *Diablos Rouges* is a real football team based in Villepinte, not far from where the story takes place. What does the name "*Diablos Rouges*" mean in English? In the United States, that term was historically used to refer to people of a certain culture in a negative way. How is that fitting, given the team's reputation?
2. On page 10, as Matt and Freeman are being held by the police, they are told by the top cop, "You shouldn't be running around with a bunch of hoodlums." Later, when the boys are released as their friends are taken away in a police van, Free says "Should be us going in too, right alongside them." (p. 11) Matt replies, "You're right, Free, but I can't help it – I feel kind of relieved." This scene, happening so close to the beginning of the book, quickly introduces the reader to the themes of prejudice and loyalty, which are both key to the story. What would you have done in the same situation if you were Matt or Freeman? Why?
3. Chapter 2 starts two months earlier than the first chapter, and the story continues from there. What is the author's purpose in starting the book where he did, rather than telling it chronologically, beginning where chapter 2 starts?
4. Have you ever done anything impulsively, without thinking of the consequences? This book has a number of events that happen because the characters act impulsively. Using jot notes, list the pros and cons of Matt's impulsive choice to go to Paris.
5. Many of Matt's teammates are from North African immigrant families. Why do you suppose they have stayed in Paris, despite clearly not finding the better life they were seeking, with fair treatment and good living conditions?
6. Matt and Freeman are both clearly searching for something too. What do you think each one is really hoping to find in Paris? Are their goals related? Do you think they'll find what they're looking for?

Pages 65–128

1. Freeman has a lengthy dream that starts on page 64. What do you think it means? Is it significant that the authors put it right before the chapter of Freeman's flashback?
2. We learn that Free has dealt with a tragedy that he has not shared with Matt or anyone else on the team. If you were in Freeman's place, would you have handled it the same way he did, both at home, and in Paris?
3. When Freeman writes a letter home (p.128), it's clear he feels he's abandoned his family. Is he right to feel this way, or do you feel he's being too hard on himself? Explain.

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Pages 129–201

1. The night the group goes to the Pizza Pie Factory is full of revelations for Matt. When Aida said, “It *is* about racism, Mathieu, but it goes beyond skin colour,” Matt doesn’t understand (p. 153). As the night progresses, things go from bad to worse. Using a T-chart and jot notes, list the events of the night on one side, and what Matt (and sometimes his fellow characters) learn from those events on the other side.
2. On page 159, Moose says “you know how it is with *les blancs*—with white boys... Sometimes you just have to put them in their place.” Why do you think he says that? Justify your opinion with evidence from the text and your own ideas.
3. When Free and Matt take their “field trip” to the D-Day beaches, we learn much more about Free’s character, and so does Matt. What does this scene in the graveyard show us about their characters and the relationship between them?
4. Think about the brochure’s message, “*They died defending freedom and democracy.*” The authors didn’t include this on a whim. How can this message be interpreted in relation to the bigger issues and events that occur in the novel? Explain.

Pages 202–297

1. The theme of family runs through the book, and we see it yet again when the boys visit Moose’s apartment (p. 214 - 224). Something special occurs between Free and Moose’s dad as they come to a mutual understanding. How do the authors use that scene to show us new sides to both men? How do you think they are both feeling? Use evidence from the text to defend your ideas.
2. The very next chapter after the encounter with Moose’s father, the story shifts back to the events that started the book. Why do you think the authors chose that moment to return us to the initial event? How does it affect the reader?
3. On page 240 the boys learn how the French media is twisting the story. What would you do if you were in their shoes? Do you think the protest walk is a good idea? Why or why not?
4. During the chaos of the riot after the protest walk, Matt does something completely out of character. How do you account for his actions? What do you think you would have done in his place? Why?
5. Matt never tells Free about what he did. Free recognizes Matt feels guilty and says “Wasn’t nothing you could do...about Moose and them.” (p. 273) Matt explains that Free doesn’t know what he did, and Free responds, “What did you do but survive when it wasn’t sure any of us would?” He adds, “You don’t ask to be a leader. Something happens and you act. It’s just who you are.” Why do you think these words are finally able to get through to Matt?
6. The final game between the Jets and the *Diablos Rouges* becomes a memorial to the boys. It also prompts both boys to make some decisions. How do you feel about the way the book ends, and what they both decide to do? What would you do in their places?

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