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Book Club Kit Discussion Guide

We Beat the Street

by

Sampson Davis, George Jenkins and Rameck Hunt
(New York: Puffin Books, 2006)

Author:

Sampson Davis, George Jenkins, and Rameck Hunt grew up in Newark, New Jersey, and graduated from Seton Hall University. Davis and Hunt received their medical degrees from Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, while Jenkins earned his dentistry degree from the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey. Today, Drs. Sampson Davis, George Jenkins, and Rameck Hunt—who call themselves The Three Doctors—work in New Jersey area hospitals.

In addition to working in their respective hospitals, they run The Three Doctors Foundation—creating opportunities for inner city communities through education, mentoring, and health awareness. Their adult book, *The Pact: Three Young Men Make a Promise and Fulfill a Dream*, reached the top of the bestseller lists and led to honors from *Essence*, Oprah Winfrey, and many others. Speaking to parents and teachers throughout the country, these charismatic men received numerous requests for a book that would make their story accessible to children at risk of falling victim to “the street,” which led to the writing of *We Beat the Street*. [From Penguin.com]

Summary:

Sampson Davis, George Jenkins, and Rameck Hunt grew up on the inner city streets of Newark, New Jersey, in a neighborhood where drugs, gangs, and survival overshadowed the importance of academic success. But together these three young men developed a bond that proved stronger. Together, they were able to achieve their goals of becoming doctors.

In this dramatic and inspirational story of three young men beating the odds, Coretta Scott King Award-winning young-adult author and teacher Sharon Draper brings the doctors’ childhood, teenage, and young-adult anecdotes vividly to life. Honest personal remarks from the doctors at the end of each chapter provide context and advice. [From Penguin.com]

Questions:

1. In this story of three New Jersey inner city youths, we see the negative and positive influences of peer pressure. Cite some examples from the story. How did the characters in the story react to these situations? Have you ever felt peer pressure? How did you react? Why? After reading this book, has your outlook on peer pressure changed?

2. What were the turning points for each of the young men that led them to enroll in the Seton Hall University pre-med program?
3. Supportive family and friends are very important in the development of our lives. They can help shape our personalities and goals in life. How did the following people influence the lives of Sampson, Rameck, and George? Use examples from the story.
 - a. Carla Dickson (student development specialist at Seton Hall University)
 - b. Ma (Rameck's grandmother)
 - c. Reggie (Sampson's martial arts instructor)
 - d. Miss Johnson (George's third grade teacher)
 - e. Jack (owner of the local neighborhood store)
4. The three doctors grew up on the inner city streets of Newark, New Jersey. a) How does this environment (the school, the neighborhood, etc.) affect the actions and development of each of the doctors? b) Discuss with your students what constitutes an "inner city." Draw parallels between the inner city setting in which the doctors grew up and that of your students. Explain how obstacles and peer pressure can appear in all kinds of neighborhoods.
5. Discuss some of the mistakes that the young men made throughout the story (i.e., Rameck and Sampson ending up in prison). How do those experiences change them for the better? What lesson does each one learn from his mistakes? What can you learn from their mistakes?
6. How are the experiences that the three young men faced during their teenage years similar to those faced by teens today? How are they different? What extra challenges did they face as teenagers?
7. Analyze each of the three young men. Make a list of some of their strengths and weaknesses, as mentioned in the story. Discuss how each of these traits eventually helped to lead each of the young men down his current path. Have your group create their own list of strengths and weaknesses. Then have each person in the group talk about one of their own strengths or weaknesses. Discuss how each of these traits can be an asset or a hindrance to their future goals.
8. What personal characteristics and behaviors are important for achieving one's goals as depicted in the story? How would you assess your own academic efforts?
9. "It's amazing how much of a positive effect one teacher can have on the life of a student."—Dr. George Jenkins. Give an example from the story that shows the impact of influential teachers. Have your group think of a person that has inspired them; it can be a teacher, a parent, or even a mentor. Students should be allowed to voluntarily share their response with the rest of the class.

10. What is the attitude of the three young men concerning learning, studying, and acquiring knowledge? How did they deal with friends who looked down on them or made fun of them for excelling in school or for dreaming of going to college?
11. The “drug scenes” are important parts in the unfolding of the story. Why do you think these are included? Investigate the problem of drugs in school communities and neighborhoods. What steps can be taken by various agencies to help eliminate this problem? How can friends help other friends who seem to be enticed by drugs?
12. Young people who have no social outlets, no place to go for fun or to play sports often tend to get into trouble as Sampson and Rameck did. What can be done to solve this problem?
13. Determination and perseverance are key ingredients in each of the young men’s success. Have each student in your class pair up with a partner and research a person in history who has had to overcome great obstacles to succeed. What was their motivation? How can their story help to inspire others? Each pair should then report their findings to the entire class.
14. Why do the doctors feel that forming a pact is so important? Do you agree or disagree? Explain your answer. If you were to form a pact, what characteristics would you yourself look for in others? What positive traits would you bring to the pact?
15. What makes a friendship? How can friends be both an asset and a liability? How does one keep the positive friends and stay away from the negative ones? I
16. In Swahili, Ujima means ‘collective work and responsibility to the community,’ and is known as one of the seven principles of Kwanzaa. According to the book, what significance does Ujima have in the doctors’ lives and why is it so important to them?

[From Penguin.com]