Each day, we all make a series of decisions that determine the ways in which we live our lives. These can include small decisions such as what to wear and what to eat for breakfast or involve larger daily decisions such as the decision to go to school or the decision to complete homework assignments on time.

In “The Other Wes Moore,” we gain insight into the lives of several people and we learn about the different decisions they each make. Some of these decisions have positive consequences and others have negative ones. Additionally, we see examples of long and short term decision making by the different individuals portrayed in the book.

This section will explore the theme of “Decision Making” and students will have opportunities to examine the decisions made by others and to critically think about their own past, present, and future decisions that impact their lives.
These discussion questions are designed to encourage students to think deeply about the scenarios and ideas presented in “The Other Wes Moore.” Specifically, these discussions will build students’ reading comprehension skills, allow them to connect the book to their own lives, provide opportunities for them to learn from their classmates, and increase their critical thinking skills.
Teacher Tip: Remind your students about the theme of “Decision Making” and encourage them to respond with that theme in mind. Although these discussion questions will guide the conversation, the teacher should ensure that all comments are grounded by the overarching theme so that students’ understanding of “Decision Making” is reinforced.

Read the following prompts and have a discussion with a partner, small group, or whole class.

1| What is a “decision”?

2| Name a few decisions that you have made today.

3| Provide an example of a “short term” decision.

4| Provide an example of a “long term” decision.

5| What are the decisions a person would need to make if they wanted to go to college?

6| What is meant by the saying, “One bad decision often leads to another bad decision”? Provide an example that illustrates your response.

7| On pages 31–35, Wes gets into a fight with a boy. Discuss his decision process and explain the consequences after he is arrested by the police.

8| Both Wes Moores get into trouble as adolescents, talk about the initial indicators that they are associating with a problematic crowd and that they are beginning to make the wrong decisions.

9| On page 67, Wes writes, “I guess it’s hard sometimes to distinguish between second chances and last chances.” What does he mean by this and how does this quote relate to the theme of “redemption”?

10| When Wes is caught spray painting with Shea what happens to him when he is thrown in the police car? How is his reaction different from Shea’s? In what ways, do you think, did this incident inform Wes’s future decision making process?

11| How does Wes’s life change when Alicia becomes pregnant? What is his mother’s reaction to this? What happened the night that Ray and Wes had a fight about Alicia?

12| On pages 103–105 we learn that after getting beat up, Wes storms into the house, gets a gun, chases Ray down the street and eventually shoots him. What are the direct and indirect reasons Wes made these decisions? What are alternate decisions he could have made in that situation?
ILLUSTRATING “CAUSE AND EFFECT”

This story highlights several instances in which both Wes Moores make a series of decisions that lead to good and bad consequences in both the short and long term. In this activity, students will identify and illustrate different cause and effect relationships from “The Other Wes Moore.” Students will also consider the decision making process and how it relates to the consequences for both Wes Moores and themselves.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Core Standards Addressed in this Activity:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Analyze how an author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Students will understand the relationship between decision making and consequences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teach Prior to Activity:

*Cause and Effect* describes the relationship between two occurrences when one occurrence makes the other happen. For example, on page 17, Mary receives a letter saying that Pell Grants were being terminated and she realizes that she would not be able to afford her college tuition. In this example, the elimination of the Pell Grant is the cause and the effect is that Mary is unable to attend college due to a lack of funding.

**Objectives:**

• Students will know the meaning of “cause and effect”

• Students will identify examples of cause and effect from “The Other Wes Moore.”

• Students will be able to illustrate cause and effect in different graphics

**Individual Work:**

1. Read the following passage from pages 29–30 and complete the missing sections from the following Cause and Effect Chart:

As football became more important in Wes’s life, his performance in school declined. His test scores were high enough to make it to the next grade, but not high enough to make a legitimate argument that he’d learned anything. He was skating by, and since this was his third elementary school, he was able to do so with fairly little notice. Wes didn’t act up in class, which kept him under the radar; his teachers spent 90 percent of their time dealing with the 5 percent of kids who did. Wes’s teachers gave his mother reports that said he was unmotivated, but Wes just claimed boredom. He always felt he was smarter than the other kids in class and that the work just didn’t hold his interest.
2. Identify an example from the book in which one effect had two causes. Complete the graphic below using the example you identified.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Football became more important in Wes's life</td>
<td>a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Wes made it to the next grade level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wes was enrolled in his third elementary school</td>
<td>c.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wes didn't act up in class</td>
<td>d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Wes said he was bored in school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. ________________________</td>
<td>b. ________________________</td>
<td>c. ________________________</td>
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<td>________________________</td>
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<td>________________________</td>
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<td>________________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3] Identify an example from the book in which three causes led to one effect. Write those causes and the effect next to the appropriate box in the following graphic.

4] Many of the examples of cause and effect from “The Other Wes Moore” illustrate the relationship between an individual’s decision making (the cause) and the consequences of his/her decisions (the effect). Keep this in mind and re-read the following passage from page 37.

“All right guys, load up, my mother cheerily yelled as she threw in one final bag and slammed shut the trunk of our lime green Ford Maverick. Nikki helped me get my seat belt done while my mother secured Shani in the car seat. Even as a kid, I could tell my mother’s aggressive good cheer was for our benefit. Before we took off, she paused to take one final look at our house, the house she’d lived in for six years. It already felt like a past life.

a. Identify the decision Wes’s mother made prior to this passage.
b. Why did she make this decision?
c. What happened as a result of her decision?
d. What might have happened if she made a different decision?
### Common Core Standards Addressed in this Activity:

- Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

- Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

- Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

### Teach Prior to Activity:

**Predictions** are when we use information from a passage or our previous experiences to guess what might happen next in the story. For example, on page 5 Wes writes, “The yell startled me, but her eyes are what I remember. ‘Get up to your damn room’ came my mother’s command from the doorway.” Based on this information, the reader can predict that “Wes will be grounded” or “Wes will be forced to apologize to his sister” based on the provided information.

### Objectives:

- Students will analyze a passage, or “case,” from “The Other Wes Moore.”

- Students will predict alternate outcomes based on different decisions.

### Individual Work:

1. Re-read pages 77–79 and complete the following chart that identifies the decisions and the consequences made by specific individuals in the story.

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**CASE STUDY ACTIVITY**

On pages 77–79, Wes writes about the day when his sister, Shani, was assaulted by another girl, Lateshia. Wes explains he and his Aunt BB decided to confront Lateshia and her brother about the incident. In this activity, students will study this “case” and discuss Wes’s decisions, the consequences of those decisions, and predict alternate outcomes had different decisions been made.
2| Now, think about alternate decisions that the individuals might have made in this case. Additionally, think about the ways in which the outcomes might have been different if these decisions were made. Complete the chart with your predictions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Alternate Decision</th>
<th>Predicted Outcome or Consequence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shani</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aunt BB</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lateshia or Her Brother</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Common Core Standards Addressed in these Writing Activities:

- Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that establishes clear relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

- Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

- Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly, supplying evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level and concerns.

- Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

- Use words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.

- Use various types of phrases (noun, verb, adjectival, adverbial, participial, prepositional, absolute) and clauses (independent, dependent; noun, relative, adverbial) to convey specific meanings and add variety and interest to writing or presentations.

- Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.

- Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

- Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence, paragraph, or text; a word’s position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.

- Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters

- Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic).

This section will increase students’ comprehension of “The Other Wes Moore” through the writing process. Specifically, students will be asked to develop written responses to prompts in different formats, for different purposes, and for different audiences.
An expository writing is a piece that presents new information to the reader. In this activity, students will revisit Wes’s initial experiences as his new military school. They will be asked to write a three paragraph expository piece that shares information about the Valley Forge Military Academy.

• Pre-writing: Re-read pages 85–97 about Wes’s experiences at the Valley Forge Military Academy. Think about the following questions and jot notes as you read. How are the plebes treated? Why are they treated this way? What are the goals of the school? What types of personalities might respond well in this environment and which ones might not? What does the school’s surrounding area look like? What are the cadets’ living quarters like?

• Draft: Now that you have re-familiarized yourself with Wes’s initial experiences at his new school, write a three paragraph expository essay that shares information about the school with readers. In your essay use the notes you took during the pre-writing and be sure to include information about the school setting, the ways students are taught, and the goals of the school.

• Final Version: After you have reviewed your draft and received feedback from a peer, parent, or teacher, write a final version of your three paragraph expository writing essay.

A creative writing piece is an opportunity for students to use their imaginations to create new characters, settings, words, and scenarios. In this writing activity, students will use a passage from “The Other Wes Moore” to create an alternate scenario that might have occurred if different decisions were made.

For item #2 of the “Case Study” activity, students identified alternate decisions the individuals might have made in that incident. Students also predicted the consequences that may have resulted from those decisions. Keep that activity in mind and re-read pages 119–121 in which Wes and Dalio are confronted by teens on their way to dinner.

• Pre-writing: Write notes about the ways in which this incident might have ended if Wes or Dalio made different decisions on that night? Write an alternate outcome and the different decisions that might have led to that new outcome.

• Draft: Write a four paragraph creative writing essay describing the new conclusion to this incident. Use your imagination to create a new “story” about that night. Include at least three different decisions made by Wes and/or Dalio that eventually leads to the new outcome you create.

• Final Version: After you have edited your draft, write the final version of your essay.

Teacher Tips:
- Begin by ensuring students understand the prompt and introduce them to the rubric so that they know what they are striving for in each scoring category.
- Use the K/W/L Chart, Venn Diagram, or other graphic organizer of your choice to help students to organize their thoughts in a pre-writing activity.
- Give students a few vocabulary words that you would like them to use in their writing.
- Ask students to use their pre-writing when they write their first draft. Be sure to ensure that they follow the prompt, use correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar.
- Partner two students together and ask them to edit each other’s work. Ensure that they know how to give and receive technical and critical feedback.
- Set a clear expectation and due date for them to submit their final draft.
### Common Core Standards Addressed in this Section:

- Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

- Come to discussions prepared having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

- Work with peers to set rules for collegial discussions and decision-making (e.g., informal consensus, taking votes on key issues, and presentation of alternate views), clear goals and deadlines, and individual roles as needed.

- Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.

- Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.

- Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

- Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

- Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.

- Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

- Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

Now that students have read different passages from “The Other Wes Moore” and have completed various discussions, activities, and written assignments, they will now have the opportunity to engage in a debate with their peers.
“Ad Hominem” means “against the man.” Through this strategy, students should “attack” their opponent’s position or credibility. For example, a student might argue that Wes’s mother made a great decision to send Wes to the Valley Forge Military Academy. Since the opposing position might lack substantial evidence, since Wes experienced great success at the school, they might argue that a family member from the opposing position taught at a military school and therefore they have a biased position. Teachers can also teach students strategies for avoiding this “attack” such as restating the facts from the book supporting their position and directly asking their opponent to provide “hard” facts from the book as well.

A “Red herring” occurs when an irrelevant idea or piece of information is entered into the debate as a “distracter.” For example, if someone holds the position that the police officer should have arrested Wes after he was caught spray painting public property, they might add, “but since the city jails are so crowded, they let him go. This is why we should have more jails in the city.” The opposing position should know that the issue of overcrowded jails, in this case, is a “red herring” because it offers up new information that isn’t directly related to the debate question. This is also an opportunity to teach students to avoid speculation and ways to challenge opponents who offer speculative evidence.

Teacher Tip: • Explain the purpose of the debate to students and model appropriate debate discourse and transitional phrases such as, “I respectfully disagree with that because…” “You make a good point about ____________, I hadn’t thought about that before.” “Can you clarify what you mean?” “Your response made me think about ____________.” These transitional phrases encourage students to be active listeners, to articulate their own opinion in response to others, and require that they utilize details from the book to support their position.

• Modify the debate format by alternating between partner/small group debates and debates with the whole class.

• For more experienced debaters or in “competitive” debates, teach students about a few debate strategies such as:
The purpose of these debate questions is to increase students' critical thinking and to strengthen their ability to critique, evaluate, and form an opinion based on the passages they have read.

1] Wes writes, on page 54 that, “Later in life, I learned that the way many governors projected the numbers of beds they’d need for prison facilities was by examining the reading scores of third graders.” Why do you think governors link prison facilities with third grade reading scores? Do you agree or disagree with this practice? Why?

2] On pages 57–58, we learn that Wes was initially lured into dealing drugs because he wanted to wear a headset. Do you believe this story or do you think Wes was drawn to drug dealing for other reasons?

3] Wes’s teacher bluntly told him, “It didn’t matter to her if I showed up because the class ran smoother when I wasn’t there.” Do you agree or disagree with the teacher’s position? What would you have done if you were in her shoes?

4] On pages 80–82, Wes is arrested for tagging and we gain insight into his thoughts related to his actions and its consequences. Why do you think the police officer responded the way he did? Did the police officer do the right thing or should he have handled the situation differently.

5] Things change very quickly for Wes once he returns from the Job Corps. Talk about the different pressures he faced and his decision to go back to his life on the streets? Based on what you know about Wes’s life experiences, do you believe this was a difficult decision for him to make? Do you think there were people or opportunities that could have prevented him from making this decision?

6] After Wes is arrested for shooting Ray, Tony arrives and their mother says, “It’s too late, Wes is already gone.” What are the two ways in which this quote could be interpreted? Do you agree with her?

7] On pages 176–178, we learn about the numerous goals Wes has accomplished since 2000. What are the calculated decisions he made in order to accomplish those goals? Do you think Wes is the person responsible for those accomplishments or do you think other individuals are responsible? Support your position with evidence from the book.