

Emma McNamara
ChLA Abstract Submission
14 October 2018

Engaging in Active Language: Hermeneutic and Semiotic Codes in Walter Dean Myers's
Monster

Structuralism, a cognitive science that dictates how reality is negotiated, argues that all humans organize the world into structures in an effort to make sense of the world. A hermeneutic code is a system of elements formulated in such a way so as to give the brain a chance to articulate storytelling. The code comprises the question, the response, the enigma, and the solution, and it is thus that the reader is able to follow along from point A to points B and beyond. A semiotic code relies heavily on the main Structuralist tenet that language and words are only as meaningful as the time in which they are used. This code requires each communicator to be able to encode and decode the message being communicated; they must be symmetrical, and if not, the message cannot be consumed. In *Monster*, Walter Dean Myers weaves together an intricate experience for his reader: how many languages, or codes, can one decipher? Does Steve Harmon, the teenaged protagonist, actually commit felony murder? How does he keep his codes straight when he is, arguably, experiencing the most traumatic time of his life? Black boys have forever been positioned as the subaltern. Here, Myers gives light to those who are unable to afford bail, to inaccurate identification, and, most hauntingly, the unanswered question of whether or not a sixteen-year-old will enter the general prison population, a physical transnational space. This paper will focus on the four main semiotic codes presented, American English, legal jargon, prison lingo, and film script, as well as the overlying hermeneutic code of ending the book on a cliffhanger.

Emma has a Master's in Urban Education and a Master's in Children's Literature. She is interested in canon construction, bildungsroman, culturally responsive literature, and affective stylistics.

Theme: Activism and Empathy