

## Bruce Brooks, *The Moves Make the Man*

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If you are teaching secondary English (say 8th grade on up) and you have any say over books you will study with your students, I have a strong recommendation:

*The Moves Make the Man*, by Bruce Brooks.

For your students, there is a lot to discuss, and some great opportunities to teach a number of literary concepts:

- Well constructed scenes and great IMAGERY: The Mock Apple Pie lesson. Bix on the Field. Basketball Tryouts. Bix's Big Fake-Out.
- EXTENDED METAPHOR. The narrator plays basketball. His new buddy plays baseball. Their dedication to their respective sports serves as a lens through which they each determine how to interact with people. As the plot unfolds, their two approaches are set against each other.
- UNRELIABLE NARRATOR (along with consistency of VOICE and TONE) - The narrator is a boy who witnesses the impact of mental illness on a family. But he doesn't really know what it is he's seeing. He's observant, so all the clues are there, but he doesn't ever really solve the mystery he's confronted with. The book's ending is ambiguous but solvable. The narrator--Jerome--is sharp, no-nonsense, and mostly fearless. He's also African-American, which is not the core of the story, and he deals with the challenges that brings as a matter of course, not asking for pity and snapping back the adults around him, well-meaning or otherwise, when it's appropriate (my students always enjoyed that).
- Excellent use of DETAIL to build a scene. Or to break down a complicated action.

For you, Brooks has some great lessons about teaching embedded in this book.

- The Mock Apple Pie Lesson made me incredibly self-conscious about my need to teach students what they need to know for life, not just the test.
- And I've never forgotten Bix's scorn when Jerome begins teaching him

basketball. Jerome tells him to dribble so he can see how adept Bix is, and Bix declines. "No, why bother? Just show him and he would do it right, why waste time doing it wrong?"

What's more, the athletic themes, the easy writing style, and the relative shortness of the book will serve as a draw to those of your students who are reluctant readers.