

Name: _____ Class: _____

What My Father Said

By Alan King
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Alan King is a Caribbean American, whose parents emigrated from Trinidad and Tobago to the U.S. In this poem, a boy wants to play with his friends, but is put to work by his dad. As you read, take notes on how the speaker feels about his dad.

- [1] It was the day I helped dad
clean out the shed, when Sly, Jay Bird
and Rashad darted to our fence
and, still panting, said
[5] they needed a fullback¹
for our neighborhood league.

Back then, we'd snag any open turf.
Uniforms were street clothes
our parents bought the year before.

- [10] It was the Saturday of our fantasy
playoffs, two teams of teens
whose lack of coordination meant
the ball slipped through shaky hands
like our chances of making the school squad.

- [15] We dreamed of screaming stadiums,
cheerleaders boogying their beautiful bodies,
fans stomping the stands every time
one of us dove toward the end zone.
We were at that age when bragging rights
[20] shined brighter than Super Bowl rings.

They asked if I could kick up the field with them.
I frizzled when dad said, No, he's busy.
That was the Saturday Mrs. Brown mulched
her rose bush and Mr. Graham set sprinklers

- [25] in a lawn that looked like AstroTurf.

That was the day I heard my boys
laugh two yards over, yelling touch down!



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1. An offensive position for a player in football

I went back inside the shed to help dad
move a spool of fat cables
[30] before I saw black billows of smoke
over the shed before Mrs. Brown and

Mr. Graham called us out
to see a planted torch blazing
near the two struck matches.

[35] I watched Sly and Jay Bird break
under the sun's interrogative² gaze. I watched
angry fingers aim blame at one another.
I watched, grateful dad said no,
that accusations weren't huddled over me,
[40] screaming: *Why you lying! You know
you set that fire!*

I lay in the grass, watching
my friends' parents whip them.
Rashad cried loud enough to scatter birds
[45] from the lamp posts. That's
when I ran home.

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which statement expresses the main theme of the poem?
 - A. Working hard is more important than playing with friends.
 - B. It can be dangerous to be careless.
 - C. Friends often turn on each other during conflict.
 - D. Parents often know best, even when we think they don't.

2. PART B: Which detail from the poem best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "We were at that age when bragging rights / shined brighter than Super Bowl rings." (Lines 19-20)
 - B. "I went back inside the shed to help dad / move a spool of fat cables" (Lines 28-29)
 - C. "I watched, grateful dad said no, / that accusations weren't huddled over me" (Lines 38-39)
 - D. "Why you lying! You know / you set that fire!" (Lines 40-41)

3. PART A: What does it mean that the speaker "frizzled" in Line 22?
 - A. He is upset that he can't join his friends.
 - B. He is overheating from all his hard work.
 - C. He is embarrassed by his father's words.
 - D. He is shocked by his father's words.

4. PART B: Which quote from the text best supports the answer to Part A
 - A. "They asked if I could kick up the field with them." (Line 21)
 - B. "That was the Saturday Mrs. Brown mulched / her rose bush" (Lines 23-24)
 - C. "That was the day I heard my boys / laugh two yards over, yelling touch down!" (Lines 26-27)
 - D. "before I saw black billows of smoke / over the shed before Mrs. Brown" (Lines 30-31)

5. How does the speaker's attitude towards not being able to play with his friends change?
