

Discussion Questions

A Most Beautiful Thing

Arshay Cooper

A MOST BEAUTIFUL THING

The True Story of America's First All-Black
High School Rowing Team

ARSHAY COOPER



1. The author writes really persuasively about accountability for one's community. Has your idea of accountability changed in the recent years with a revolution amidst a pandemic?
 2. The author mentions that '90s TV taught him how to be a man, and that some Black actors felt like brothers and role models. Who were your TV role models and why? What does this say about the author's relationship with adults in his life?
 3. Explain the theme of overcoming obstacles at the different stages of the team members' lives.
 4. Throughout the book, Arshay Cooper talks about rowing victories and failures, but also about personal victories and failures. Were there moments that especially touched you or that you identified with?
 5. As portrayed in the memoir, how would you describe Arshay Cooper's relationship with his mother? Was she a good mother? Did she change as a parent over the course of the story? Was Arshay a good son?
 6. What does *A Most Beautiful Thing* tell us about what it means to be an athlete? Do you think Arshay Cooper's path to becoming an athlete was typical? How did elements of his background either draw him toward rowing or serve as obstacles in his path?
 7. Although this crew from Manley High School was the first African-American high school rowing team, the first African-American team was actually a college team which originated in the 1960s and 1970s at Howard University. How does this history play into Arshay Cooper's goal to see a dramatic increase in athletes of color named to the 2028 US Olympic Team?
 8. How is memoir or the art of telling a personal story an act of service to fellow humans?
 9. How does *A Most Beautiful Thing* help widen our lens to better see the systemic inequities that exist in athletics? In public schools? In cities like Chicago?
 10. Arshay Cooper helps Alvin Ross to recognize he has moved from making a bad choice to a new choice. How often are young people afforded with new choices—albeit “good choices.” And how does race, gender, socioeconomics affect this option even further?
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