

**English 12 & Honors English 12**

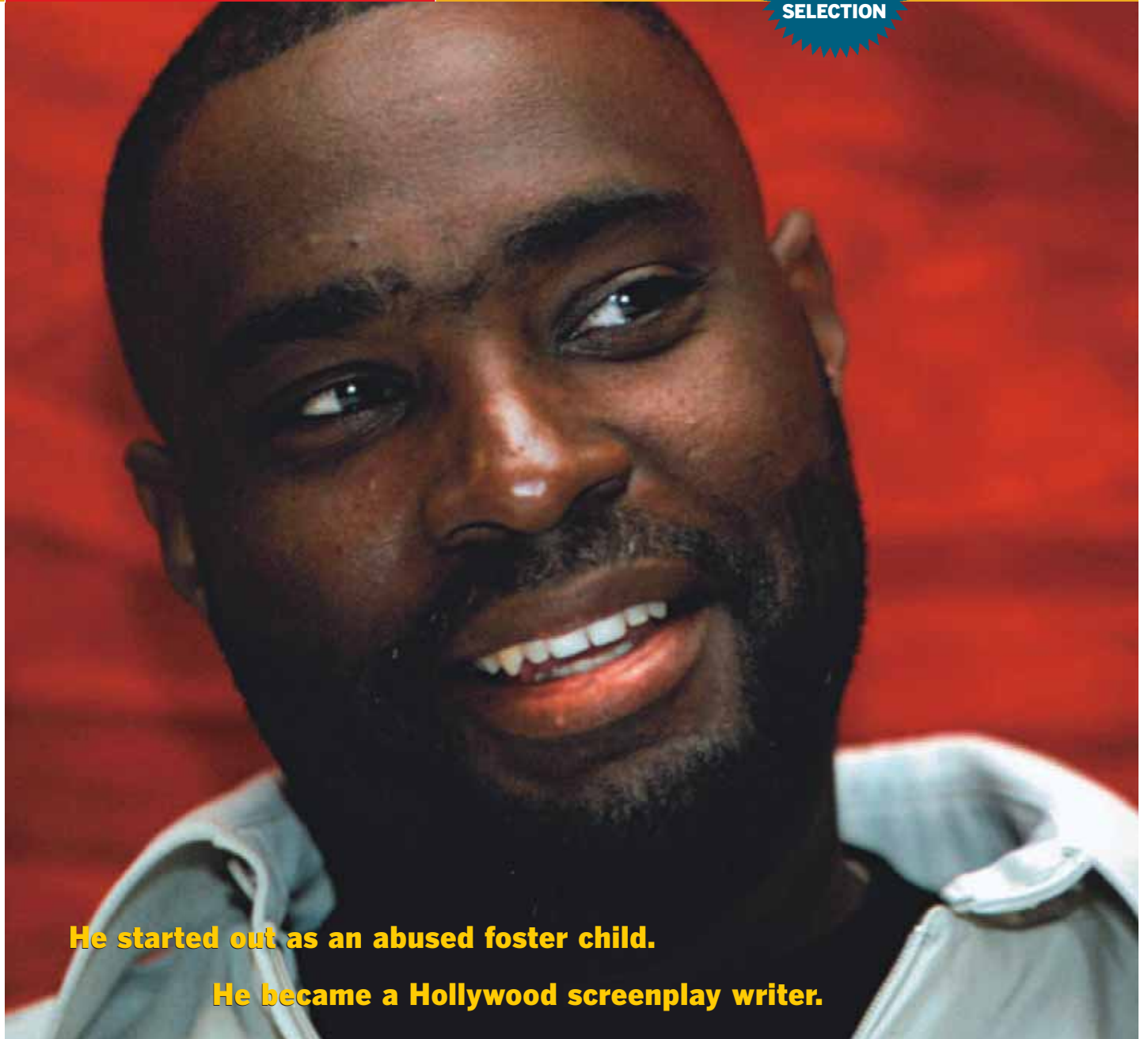
**Blizzard Bag Assignment #2**

**Assigned: Friday, April 4, 2014**

**Due: April 14, 2014**

**Receive Extra Credit for turning in your work by  
Wednesday, April 9, 2014**

- Read the excerpt from *Finding Fish*
- On notebook paper, answer LC Book Club Questions #1 & 2



**He started out as an abused foster child.**

**He became a Hollywood screenplay writer.**

His life story is a triumph over adversity.

# Finding Fish

by Antwone Fisher



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**The Story So Far** When the book opens, Antwone is a small child living with a cruel foster mother, Mrs. Pickett. His birth mother had turned him over to the state because she was unable to care for him. His biological father had been murdered before he was born.

**IF I FOLLOW THE PATH OF MEMORY BACK TO ITS START, I BEGIN LIFE LOOKING** out my upstairs bedroom window. It's here I have my best daydreams and where I can make up stories I like to think about. In my mind's first flash of light, I am here, on the inside looking out the Picketts' two-story house on a street at the edge of Glenville, the second house from the corner, a block from 105. This is a snow-covered morning when the other kids, already school age, are gone and I'm alone, staring out into the blinding whiteness, thinking it's no fun being left behind, no one to play with.

There is something about being at this window that makes me feel safe. Depends on the smell, though. Young as I am, I have already learned to tell what kind of day it's going to be by the scent of the air in the morning. I can smell rain coming. Not just rain and weather and snow, like now, but other clues. Pancakes on the stove, I know it's going to be a good day. The smell of eggs and grits or water steaming off the driveway after Mizz Pickett hoses it down, either one means I better be on the lookout all day.

I squint my eyes real hard and try to use my special heat-ray vision to melt all the snow. Nothing happens. My powers must need more practice, I decide. Maybe I should try the looking-through-walls trick. That way, I can catch everybody in their alien monster faces.

Yep, everybody in this house, except me—aliens. Mizz Pickett, the alien leader, Reverend Pickett (her trusty sidekick), and their older kids, whose last names are Pickett. Even Dwight and Flo, who have different last names, like me. Children aliens. They just have to pretend to be scared, so I think they're human like me.

The thing about aliens is that when I'm not in the room they don't have on their human faces. And they have kind of goat bodies with hooves and horns and Devil bugging-out eyeballs and long black sideburns. But just before I come into a room, they slip into disguise so I can't catch 'em. One day, I tell myself, I'm gonna be reeeeaall quiet and tiptoe down the stairs from the bedroom and sneak soooo carefully into the kitchen and catch Mizz Pickett standing over the stove in her alien body and face—before she uses her powers to see me first. Cooking racoons always weakens her powers.

But instead of trying to catch her this day, I keep standing at the window, practicing my snow-melting skills. Right now, I know, if I really go out there, the snow will freeze me, so I better just stay in here and daydream some more.



It seems the time came for the visits to child welfare whenever I was doing something I didn't want to be interrupted from, like daydreaming. That's the first thing. Next, I got to be on the watch that she's gonna try to be nice to me. But it don't never last, and that's why I rather she stay her regular way—mean.

*continued* →

**MEET THE AUTHOR:**  
**Antwone Fisher**

**BORN**

1959, in a Cleveland, Ohio, prison hospital.

**GREW UP**

In foster care and on the streets of Cleveland.

**WHAT**

**SAVED HIM**

Joining the U.S. Navy, where he finally developed a sense of pride and self-worth.

**HOW THE SCREENPLAY BECAME A MOVIE**

After 41 drafts, he sold the screenplay to 20th Century Fox.

**HOW IT BECAME A BOOK**

The memoir was written after the movie.

**QUOTE**  
"I think back upon a childhood full of longing for belonging and see my life now as what I have created out of my dreams."

Understanding voice skills: see page 22

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EXCERPT  
FROM FINDING  
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I'm at my spot, looking out the window, and I feel her there, standing behind me, all in her monster face and stuff, just waiting for me to turn around so she can practice putting on her human face. That's how monsters play. But I don't fall for that 'cause I know she's not nice. Besides, she's too old to play with kids. So I keep staring out the window, pretending I don't know she's there at the door.

**D**wight is in the closet. He's mad at everybody 'cause he's gotta go with me on the visit to the social services office. That's where all the white people are. Except the one they call my caseworker, who's colored like me. There's another one I saw there, too. She was late I heard them say. Another time they said she was coming but she didn't. But I don't care.

I only like to see the toys they got in the toy box and play with them for a little while.

Usually I have to go there by myself but today Dwight's coming, too, and I'm glad. It means I'm not the only one wearing the church clothes. It makes me feel special when I'm the only one wearing them on a weekday. I hate feeling special.

I can feel her behind me, opening her mouth, showing her big sharp teeth, and now I'm scared, but this time, I turn around real fast and she's changed human again. Standing there in the doorway, smiling that fake smile.

"Where is Dwight?" she says.

The closet door creaks slowly open and out steps Dwight, his red-green-and-yellow-plaid Sunday-school bow tie slightly crooked.

"What-choo doin' in dat dhere closet? Nigga! Get on out here so we can get ready ta go! Ya think we got all day?"

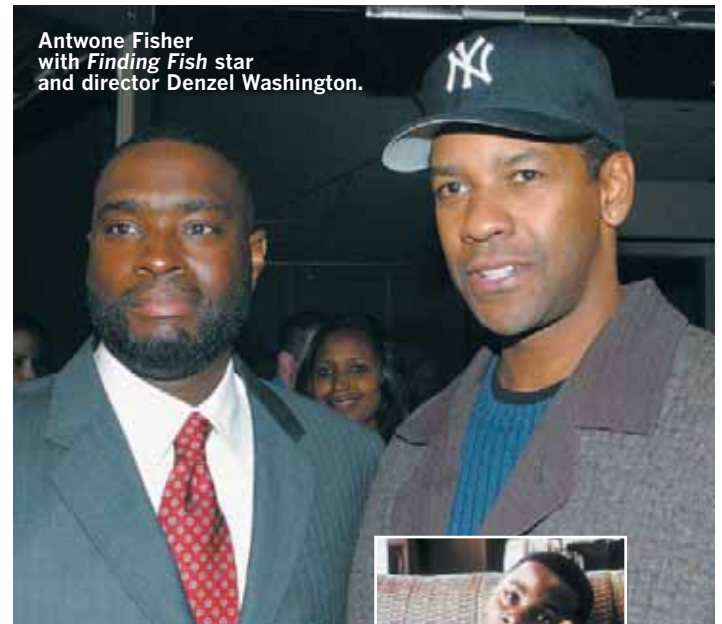
"No, ma'am."

She grabs him by the shoulder and jerks at the bow tie to straighten it.

Then she turns back to me with that same put-on smile as I hop to the floor in panic. Panic that she will yell at me next. But instead of yelling, she talks in a making-fun teasing way, telling Dwight, "Twonny has ta see his momma today." Barely concealing her disapproval of the visit, her mouth twists as she talks and she pushes up her glasses from slipping down her nose, like she's mad at the glasses that she has to take me downtown in the rain.

Her words stick in my ears and my mind begins searching as usual. Mom? Momma? I don't like that, either. It's confusing, hearing about that lady. Who is that? What does it mean? It must not be good, 'cause if it was, I wouldn't hate hearing I gotta go visit her. Momma. The one Mizz Pickett looks at me and talks about, saying, "And *you* and your no-account mammy." Makes me feel bad, 'cause whoever she is, she's too poor to get a bank account; and ashamed that somehow it has something to do with me.

As Mizz Pickett takes out our good coats and commands us to put them on, all I can think about is that it's not fair to make it my fault that some lady I don't know is



Antwone Fisher with *Finding Fish* star and director Denzel Washington.



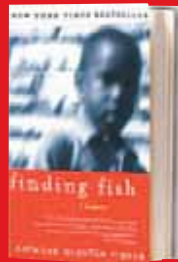
Derek Luke as Fisher; Denzel Washington stars as the Army psychiatrist who saves Fisher's life.



## 20 Minute Essay >>TAKE 20 MINUTES

TO PLAN AND WRITE AN ESSAY BASED ON THE FOLLOWING:

This excerpt is told from a young child's point of view. How does Fisher create that effect? Give examples from the text.



## LCBook Club Questions

1 Fisher daydreams of having superhuman powers. Why? What does it reveal about how he feels?

2 Using examples from the excerpt, describe how the author communicates his feelings about Mizz Pickett.

my no-account mammy. So I don't like her and I'm not gonna like her and it's her fault. And I sure am having a hard time trying to look excited about going to see her now.

In our coats, Dwight and I hurry down what we call the linoeum stairs, slippery plastic with nailed metal strips on the edges. Somebody somewhere must have had the idea this was safe for children. Besides the Pickett twins, who are teenagers, there are three of us younger kids in the house—me; Dwight, a year older than me; Flo, who's eight years old—and we've all fallen down these steps.

At the lower landing, Mizz Pickett waits in her gigantic fox-fur coat. I know it's fox fur 'cause the head of the unlucky animal is still attached to the collar. Its beady eyes always seem to stare right at me. Mizz Pickett stands there frowning in this furry coat and on her head is her cashmere pillbox hat with a long peacock feather sticking out into the air—*platow*.

These are her *good* clothes, what she wears to church and when she wants people to think she's an upper-class Negro, unlike, she says, "most all the low-down niggas in the city." And then she always adds, "Niggas ain't nothin'."

At the bottom of the steps, she gathers us in front of her, examining us as if seeing us for the first time ever in her old life.

Then it begins. I brace myself, close my eyes, shrug my shoulders. It stinks. Now I feel it. It's wet and slimy like always. It has to be after she stuck her finger in her mouth, sucked it till dripping with enough spit to wipe the corners of my eyes, nose, and mouth.

She turns to Dwight, who hasn't said a word yet, but now, wiggling to break free from her, begs, "I already washed my face!"

"Shut up, nigga, and hold still 'fore I knock your head off," she replies, jerking him closer. She slimes him, too.

I crack a grin at Dwight. He gives me a mean look in return but then cracks a smile, too. We both knew since last night it was coming.

Mizz Pickett grabs her black patent-leather purse and transfers a few items from her everyday pocketbook into it and she's ready to go. There's nothing dainty about this full-figured, brown-skinned, middle-aged woman, but she holds the patent-leather purse in a real dainty way on her wrist with her hand turned up. I think to myself that this must also be meant to add to her look of a woman of high social standing.

Walking single file behind her, Dwight and I follow Mizz Pickett through the living room, onto the enclosed porch, and out onto the front stoop. The scent of Mizz Pickett's spit still is in my nose, making my stomach sick as the cold heavy raindrops splatter on my face and the wind whips around me. Dizzy and afraid of what's coming next, I feel the need to throw up, but if I do, it'll mess up my church clothes and then I'll really get it. Like before. So I think about something else until the feeling goes away. ■

**Dizzy and afraid of what's coming next, I feel the need to throw up, but if I do, it'll mess up my church clothes and then I'll really get it. Like before. So I think about something else until the feeling goes away.**

**What Happens Next** Fisher survives years of physical and emotional abuse from the Picketts. When he is 18 he joins the U.S. Navy where he excels—and begins recovering from his traumatic childhood. After the Navy, while working as a security guard for Sony Pictures, he writes the first draft of the screenplay that will become *Finding Fish*, directed by and starring Denzel Washington.

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## UNDERSTANDING VOICE

FYI: TO SHARE THE STORY OF HIS CHILDHOOD, **ANTWONE FISHER** USES A NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE CALLED *FIRST-PERSON PERSPECTIVE*. HE INVITES US TO GET INSIDE HIS HEAD, TO SEE HIS WORLD THROUGH HIS EYES. TO ACHIEVE THIS EFFECT, HE USES THE PRONOUNS *I* AND *WE*. FISHER'S CAREFUL CHOICE OF WORDS ALSO CREATES A CONVINCING CHILD'S VOICE.

In the sentences below, underline the pronouns that signal the use of first-person perspective. Then circle the word or phrase that sounds like a child's voice.

For example:

It's here I have my best daydreams and where I can make up stories I like to think about.

### SELECTION FROM THE TEXT

This is a snow-covered morning when the other kids . . . are gone and I'm alone, staring out into the blinding whiteness, thinking it's no fun being left behind, no one to play with.

I have already learned to tell what kind of day it's going to be by the scent of the air in the morning. . . . Pancakes on the stove, I know it's going to be a good day.

I squint my eyes real hard and try to use my special heat-ray vision to melt all the snow.

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**>>Your Turn!** What are some of your earliest memories? Use first-person perspective and words or phrases you used as a child to describe one memory of your childhood.