The Blues of Flats Brown

Flats Brown is a dog who lives in a junkyard. His owner, the mean and nasty A.J. Grubbs, makes Flats and his friend Caleb fight other dogs, while all Flats wants to do is play the blues on his guitar. One day, Flats and Caleb run away from A.J. Grubbs and begin to make their living playing the blues on the street and in clubs. But A.J. Grubbs follows them and finds them. How can Flats make A.J. Grubbs leave him to the music he loves?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Walter Dean Myers grew up in New York City. As a child, he loved to read, and he began writing for magazines and advertisers when he left the army. His first book, Where Does the Day Go?, won a contest for writers sponsored by the Council on Interracial Books for Children. Since then, he was written many acclaimed books for children and young adults.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR
Nina Laden grew up in the New York City area and now lives in a farmhouse in Seattle with her husband and three stepsons. She began drawing as a child, and after receiving a degree in fine arts from Syracuse University, she worked as a freelance illustrator. She has illustrated several other picture books.

CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES
Music: Playing the Blues
Play a recording of blues music for the class. Artists to listen to include B.B. King, Stevie Ray Vaughan, and Buddy Guy. Have children listen carefully and write down descriptions of any images the music forms in their minds. Children can discuss and compare their reactions to the music.

Language Arts: Unusual Metaphors
The author uses many unusual metaphors in the story. Write these on the chalkboard: “as out of place as a three-legged skunk”; “skinny as a rail”; “lower than a bowlegged worm.” Have children volunteer definitions for these phrases. Then ask them to make up their own metaphors to describe these feelings: angry, sad, fearful.

Social Studies: Land of the Blues
Explain to the class that the blues is a musical form that has its roots in the bayou culture of the deep South. Ask them to work in groups to prepare reports on the bayou, and have them answer these questions in their reports:

a. Where are bayous found?
b. What kinds of plant and animal life are found in bayous?
c. How do people live in bayou areas?

Children can share the information they find with the rest of the class.

Music: Singing “The New York City Blues”
If any children can read music and play an instrument or sing, have them perform “The New York City Blues” for the class. You may also wish to have a school music teacher perform the song. Children can work together to learn the song and can sing it for another class or for an assembly.

INTERNET ACTIVITY
Before you send children to do research using any of the keywords listed below, you may wish to try them yourself to be sure the sites are suitable.

Internet Activity
Children can share the information they find with the rest of the class.

Music: The Blues of Flats Brown
Have children use the keywords music AND the blues to find information on the Internet about the history of the blues. Encourage them to work in pairs to find out about a famous blues performer or a famous place where the blues were performed. Children can report on what they learn to the class.