

## Jazz

### ABOUT THE STORY

In this collection of poems, Walter Dean Myers and Christopher Myers celebrate aspects of jazz music in words and art. From the blues to Louis Armstrong, from love songs to funeral music, the poems use rhythm and rhyme to echo the rhythms of jazz in all its varied forms.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Walter Dean Myers was born in West Virginia family in 1937 and grew up in New York City. In 1970, he was hired as an acquisitions editor for Bobbs Merrill, a publisher interested in developing more African American writers for young people. Already, he had published his first children's book, and in 1975, he wrote his first young adult novel. Two years later, he began writing full time. He has twice received Newbery Honor recognition and is a three-time recipient of the Coretta Scott King Award. His book *Blues Journey* is another Live Oak Readalong.

### ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Christopher Myers is the son of acclaimed author Walter Dean Myers. He is a graduate of Brown University and has participated in the exclusive Whitney Museum of American Art Independent Studio Program. Myers began his children's book career doing research to help his father, and went on to illustrate several of the elder Myers' books. In 1998, the two collaborated on *Harlem*, which was named a Caldecott Honor Book as well as a Coretta Scott King Honor Book. They have also collaborated on *Blues Journey*, another Live Oak Readalong. Christopher Myers lives in Brooklyn, New York.

### INTRODUCING THE STORY

Ask children if they have ever listened to jazz music. Have volunteers describe the music. Then tell them that the book they will read is a collection of poems about jazz.

### READING ACTIVITIES

#### **Comprehension/Thinking Skills**

- "In the introduction, where does the author say jazz comes from?"
- "When was the term 'jazz' first used?"
- "When was jazz introduced to European audiences?"
- "In 'Goodbye to Old Bob Johnson,' how does the tone of the poem change?"
- "Which poem do you like the most? Why? (*Express Opinions*)"

### Vocabulary

Write these words and definitions on the board. Have children copy them and draw a line matching each word to its definition.

deacon	quick talk
syncopating	tie
repartee	church official
sultry	rhythmically
tether	hot

### CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

#### **Language Arts: Louis Armstrong**

One of the poems talk about jazz great Louis Armstrong. Have children work with partners to find out about Louis Armstrong. Ask them to write a brief biography telling where and when he was born and grew up and, how he became a musician. Encourage children to illustrate their biographies with photographs or drawings.

#### **Music: Listen to Louis**

Play the music of Louis Armstrong for children. Ask them to listen closely. After they have heard several pieces, discuss the musician's style and sound with them. Encourage children to look back at the poem about Louis Armstrong, and talk about how the poem reflects the music of the man.

#### **Social Studies: Jazz in New Orleans**

Several of the poems mention New Orleans, in which a distinctive style of jazz developed. Have children find out about jazz and New Orleans by looking in encyclopedias, books about Louisiana or New Orleans, or online. Ask them to write a description of the ways in which New Orleans jazz developed and how it is different from other kinds of jazz.

#### **Music: Jazz Instruments**

The poet mentions many different kinds of instruments: piano, clarinet, banjo, trumpet, trombone, saxophone, cornet, and bass. Have children choose one of these instruments to research. Ask them to find out about the history of the instrument they have chosen, how it is made, and how it makes music. Children can report on the information they have found to the class.

### 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.

#### **Jazz in New Orleans**

Have children go to the website of the Louisiana State Museum to learn about jazz in the state: <http://www.crt.state.la.us/louisiana-state-museum/collections/jazz/index>. Children can look at photographs of jazz greats and their instruments and listen to jazz selections. Have them report back to the class on what they learn from the site.