

SWEET MUSIC IN HARLEM

Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award Nominee 2007 Grades 3-5

Submitted by Deanna McMillion, Graduate Student at School of Library and Information Science, Louisiana State University (Professor: Dr. Margie Thomas); and Yen Tran, Student at University of Louisiana at Lafayette (Instructor: Dorothy L. Grimsley)

Sweet Music in Harlem by Debbie A. Taylor. Illustrated by Frank Morrison. Lee and Low Books Inc., 2004. 32 p.

Summary

Uncle Click is an African American trumpet player, who can make the salt-shakers dance and the wallpaper curl when he plays. While waiting to have his photograph taken for *Highnote Magazine*, he realizes that he does not have his signature beret; so he asks his nephew C.J. to go find the missing hat. C.J. races through the streets of Harlem visiting all of the places Uncle Click had been the day before: the barbershop, the diner, and the jazz club where Uncle Click plays. C.J. finds lots of other articles Uncle Click left behind but not the beret. C.J. returns without the beret, but he has managed to spread the word about the photographer and many of Harlem's most famous jazz players show up for the photograph. People spill out over the steps of the brownstone and into the street, laughing and smiling for the special occasion.

The repetitive, rhythmic text is filled with colorful phrases describing Harlem and its community of people. The vibrant, lively acrylic illustrations of the Harlem neighborhood include exaggerated characters that complement the rhythmic text.

The inspiration for the story is a photograph taken by Art Kane in Harlem in 1958 for *Esquire* magazine. Like the story, the photographer had intended to photograph just a few musicians; but word spread and over fifty-seven jazz musicians (plus neighbors and children) posed for the now famous picture. The photograph is reproduced on the last page of the book with all of the musicians identified.

Awards

Children's Book Council (CCBC) Choices 2005

Bank Street College of Education, "Outstanding Merit" Best Children's Books, 2005

International Reading Association, Children's Book Award Notable, 2005

Author's Biography

Debbie A. Taylor is a first-time picture book author who lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan with her husband and children. She has had several stories published in children's literary magazines including *Spider* and *New Moon*. Her hobbies are reading and visiting museums and botanical gardens. She attended Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland State University and Ohio Dominican College and holds a Master's Degree in Creative Writing. Taylor is currently working as an administrator at the University of Michigan's College of Engineering.

<http://www.sweetmusicinharlem.com/index.htm>

Illustrator's Biography

Frank Morrison is an established artist; *Sweet Music in Harlem* is his first venture into the world of children's literature. He was born in Boston, Massachusetts but grew up in New Jersey, where he demonstrated a flair for break dancing and graffiti art. Morrison toured for a time with The Sugar Hill Gang and made an appearance on *Showtime at the*

Apollo. While on tour, Morrison was able to visit the Louvre Museum and rediscovered his passion for art. His experiences with song and dance, as well as his childhood art form of graffiti, are reflected in the style of his art. His family and God have inspired his work. The letters "TTG" which stand for "Thanks to God" accompanies his signature on his paintings.

<http://morrisongraphics.com>

Related Titles

Bippity Bop Barbershop by Natasha Anastasia Tarpley.

Harlem: A Poem by Walter Dean Myers. Illustrated by Christopher Myers.

Harlem Renaissance: Art of Black America by Charles Miers.

Harlem Stomp: A Cultural History of the Harlem Renaissance by Laban Carrick Hill.

Jazz A B Z: A Collection of Jazz Portraits from A to Z by Wynton Marsalis. Illustrated by Paul Rogers.

Jazz Man by Mary Hays Weik.

Jazzy Miz Mozetta by Brenda C. Roberts.

Lookin' for Bird in the City by Robert Burleigh.

Me and Uncle Romie: A Story Inspired by the Life and Art of Romare Bearden by Claire Hartfield.

My Family Plays Music by Judy Cox.

Perfect Harmony: A Musical Journey with the Boys Choir of Harlem by Charles R. Smith.

Rent Party Jazz by William Miller. Illustrated by Charlotte Riley-Webb.

The Sound That Jazz Makes by Carole Boston Weatherford.

Tree of Hope by Amy Littlesugar. Illustrated by Floyd Cooper.

Uncle Jeb's Barbershop by Margaree King Mitchell.

Uptown by Bryan Collier.

Visiting Langston by Willie Perdomo.

Classroom Connections

The Kennedy Center ARTSEdge: Harlem

<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/content/2459/>

Lesson plan for grades 3-4 that introduces students to Harlem.

The Kennedy Center ARTSEdge: Musical Harlem

<http://www.artsedge.kennedy-center.org/content/2258/>

Lesson Plan for grades K-4 introduces students to the different musical styles and musicians associated with Harlem.

Pathfinder: Jazz

<http://42explore.com/jazz.htm>

This site has excellent links, plus classroom activity projects related to jazz.

Biography and History

- There are 57 musicians in the photo on the last page in the book. Have students research in books and the Internet to get information about these musicians. Have each student write a biography or create a brochure about one of the musicians. See Art Kane's site <http://www.artkane.com/index.html> for an interactive version of the photograph.
- Have students read books and locate information about the Harlem Renaissance and its significance in American History. Oral presentations (role-playing) to

communicate what they've learned about the Harlem Renaissance. They may expand their research to include art and literature as well as music.

Music

- Have the class listen to an example of jazz performed by Count Basie or one of the other musicians in the photo.
- History of Jazz (Social Studies)
Scholastic has information about the history of jazz with activity ideas for grades 3-8. http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/bhistory/history_of_jazz.htm

Social Studies

- Students can use the Internet to research Harlem street games. Students can then play a street game of Harlem, such as kick the can.

Web Links

Author and Illustrator

The Collection Shop: Frank Morrison Art Collection

http://www.thecollectionshop.com/Frank_Morrison_Collection.asp?Affiliate=63

Art collection and biography of the illustrator

Lee & Low Books: Debbie Taylor

<http://www.leeandlow.com/booktalk/taylor.html>

<http://www.leeandlow.com/books/sweetmusic.html>

Publisher's site includes a biography of the author and a description of the book.

Michigan Engineering: Meet Our Staff

<http://www.engin.umich.edu/students/support/wie/about/staff.html>

Brief biography of Taylor's educational background and career history at the University of Michigan.

Morrison Graphics

<http://morrisongraphics.com>

Shows examples of his fine art that is for sale.

Sweet Music in Harlem

<http://www.sweetmusicinharlem.com/work2.htm>

This site includes information about the book and author.

Booklists

Harry W. Schwartz Bookshop

www.schwartzbooks.com

This site allows you to browse by categories, for example—Music—Jazz

<http://www.schwartzbooks.com/cgi-bin/category/1514956>

Lists children's books related to jazz.

Just for Kids

www.just-for-kids.com

This site allows you to browse by age and by broad subject.

http://www.just-for-kids.com/ETHAA08_3.HTM

Lists books by and about African Americans.

Harlem

Art Kane: Pictures from a Visionary Photographer

<http://www.artkane.com/index.html>

Homepage of the photographer whose picture inspired the book. By clicking on the icon Harlem 1958, you can see the actual picture. Click on the picture and a close up image appears, allowing the viewer to roll the mouse over it to show a name key for each individual in the photo.

Harlem's Tree of Hope

http://bigapplejazz.com/tree_of_hope.htm

History and Legend of Harlem's Tree of Hope.

HarlemLIVE

<http://www.harlemlive.org/main.html>

A web-based magazine produced by teens in the Harlem area; the entire program is ran and managed by teens between the ages of 13 and 21. On the website you will find new articles, personal essays, poetry, and photography.

The Kennedy Center ARTSEdge: Harlem

<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/content/2459/>

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Jazz

Pathfinder: Jazz

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This site has excellent links, plus classroom activity projects related to jazz.

Scholastic: Culture and Change: Black History—History of Jazz

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/bhistory/>

http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/bhistory/history_of_jazz.htm

This site gives an overview of the history of jazz. It includes an interview with Wynton Marsalis.