

Novel Resource #4

Book: Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue

Author: Anna Harwell Celenza

Illustrator: JoAnn E. Kitchel

Publisher: Charlesbridge

Copyright Year: 2006

Young Hoosier Book Award Nominee



Genre: Biography

Themes: The story of how George Gershwin writes the musical piece called *Rhapsody in Blue*.

Point of View: Third person (told by author, Anna Harwell Celenza)

Main Characters:

- ❖ George Gershwin: composer of *Rhapsody in Blue*, worked in New York
- ❖ Ira Gershwin: brother of George Gershwin, claims he came up with the title for the song, worked in New York
- ❖ B.G. (Buddy) DeSylva: friend to the two brothers, worked in New York
- ❖ Paul: wrote the article stating that George would be putting on a concerto, old friend to the brothers

Setting: New York, 1924

Conflict: The conflict in this story is internal. George Gershwin is struggling to be able to write a piece for the concerto. When he composes most of the piece, he struggles to finish it.

Resolution: Gershwin leaves for Boston for rehearsals. The beat of the train when it started is what he started with. He was able to move quickly with these thought, but got stuck at the ending piece. When he returns home and attends a party, he hears the melody that will be the ending to the song.

Interest Levels: Ages 5-9

Reading Levels: Grades 3-5

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(Book talk)

Have you ever had a hard starting and finishing a project? George Gershwin's story is just the same. However, he doesn't stop working to complete his task. He uses every day life to complete his musical piece. All along, it was right under his nose, he just didn't see it.

Now that he has his piece ready, he must present it. That sounds a lot easier than it really is. The audience is so unhappy with the opening acts that they are already up out of their chairs and heading for the exit. Will Gershwin's piece win them over? Will they turn back around and stay, or continue to the nearest exit? Join George Gershwin while he composes and performs *Rhapsody in Blue*.

(Annotation)

Anna Harwell Celenza writes a story about George Gershwin that is based on a true event in 1924. Celenza tells the story of how George Gershwin combines klezmer, foxtrot, ragtime, and blues to make one musical piece. The story takes place over a three week period of time where George goes through a mix of emotions while writing his concerto. By the end, Gershwin has produced a crowd pleasing performance. He turns a wreck of a concert into a joyful evening. Most importantly, his three weeks pays off as *Rhapsody in Blue* is now a famous piece of composed music.

Celenza's choice of words gives the reader a sense of the emotion that is being felt by the characters in the story. She has chosen very vivid words to help the reader feel like they are part of the story. Along with the words, the illustrations by JoAnn E Kitchel are extraordinary. The pictures paint the exact image that the words would make you imagine. It is almost as if Kitchel were watching the story inside Celenza's head while she was writing. I was very impressed with the way the story and illustrations fit each other.

About the Author: Anna Harwell Celenza



Photograph by: Bruce Fox

Publisher's Homepage: <http://www.charlesbridge.com>

Interesting Facts/Background:

- ❖ Quote from Celenza: "If my books can make classical music more accessible to kids, that would be a dream come true."
- ❖ Grew up on a farm in Pleasant Garden, North Carolina
- ❖ B.A. in art history and music history at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro
- ❖ Masters and Ph.D. from Duke University
- ❖ Part of the faculty of Peabody Conservatory and John Hopkins University
- ❖ Writer for "Performance Today" on NPR
- ❖ All of her books are about music history and the history of art
- ❖ Lives in Baltimore, Maryland

Other Books Published:

The Farewell Symphony

Pictures at an Exhibition

The Heroic Symphony

Bach's Goldberg Variations

Discussion Questions

Pre-reading:

- ❖ How do you feel when you can't think of how to do something?
- ❖ What do you think Rhapsody means in the title?
- ❖ What feeling do you get when you are rushed on an assignment?

During reading:

- ❖ Where and when does this story take place? (page 1)
- ❖ What does George Gershwin become upset about? (pages 1-2)
- ❖ What does Paul do to convince George he can compose a concerto? (pages 5 and 8)
- ❖ How does George's mood change throughout the weekend? (pages 9-10)
- ❖ What do you think George will do next? (page 10)
- ❖ Do you think George is getting somewhere with these beats in his head? (page 12)
- ❖ What do we learn about the word rhapsody? (page 14)
- ❖ What are the memories that George is having? (pages 13-14)
- ❖ Do you think these are happy or sad times? (pages 13-14)
- ❖ Why does Ira suggest that George take a break? (page 17)
- ❖ How does his night out help him? (pages 19-20)
- ❖ How does an artist help George with the name of his song? (page 21)
- ❖ Where will the concerto taken place? (page 22)
- ❖ What day will the concerto take place? (page 22)
- ❖ What is George so worried about? (page 23)
- ❖ Do you think George even wants to play for the audience? Why or why not? (page 23)
- ❖ What changed the audience's mind? (page 24)
- ❖ Name some of the instruments that were played. (pages 24-25)
- ❖ How do you think the audience would rate his concerto? (pages 26-27)

Post-reading:

- ❖ How do you think Gershwin felt when the night was over?
- ❖ Did his hard work pay off?
- ❖ What are some lessons that you learned about working hard?
- ❖ What does the title of this book mean?

Vocabulary List

- (page 1) orchestra: a large group of musicians playing together
- (page 1) elite: a group considered the best
- (page 2) concerto: a musical piece for a solo and orchestra
- (page 4) premiering: first in time
- (page 5) compose: to put together
- (page 8) medleys: a mixture of things put together
- (page 9) improvise: to compose
- (page 10) rehearsals: a repeated practice
- (page 12) syncopated: to shorten
- (page 14) kaleidoscope: anything changing
- (page 14) rhapsody: a string of songs put together
- (page 17) swanky: stylish
- (page 19) spacious: having space or room
- (page 23) heckle: to annoy
- (page 23) riot: wild or violent disorder
- (page 25) cue: to indicate an entrance
- (page 26) virtuosity: skill in a performance art
- (page 26) fiery: strong emotion

Read-Aloud Passages

Passage 1:

Pages 5 and 8 (Start at "What concerto?"; End at the end of page 8)

This passage tells the why George Gershwin was chosen to write the concerto. It also tells the reader how the emotional ride began and why he finally said yes.

Passage 2:

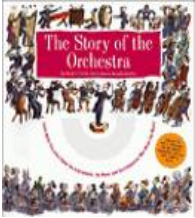
Page 23

This passage gives the readers an idea what it would be like to perform in an ugly situation. It allows them to really feel what Gershwin would have been feeling (nervous).

Anticipation Statement

<u>Before</u> True/False What do you think?	<u>Anticipation Statement</u>	<u>After</u> Were you correct? Why or why not?
	It is okay to assume someone can get something done without asking first.	
	Every artist and musician includes a color name in the title.	
	Rehearsals are always required before a performance.	
	Music now is all different from back in 1924.	
	You must have a rhapsody to have a concerto.	

If you enjoyed reading Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue, you'll love...



Story of the Orchestra: Listen While You Learn About the Instruments, the Music and the Composers Who Wrote the Music!

By: Robert Levine, Meredith Hamilton, and Robert T. Levine

Like Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue, this book gives the reader an idea of what the orchestra would be like. The story tells about every aspect of the orchestra; the instruments, the songs, and the writers.



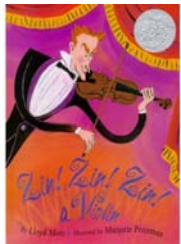
Pictures at an Exhibition By: Anna Harwell Celenza

This story is about three friends who enjoy art and music. One of the friends is having trouble writing his song, so he attends an art exhibition with his friend. Like George, he finds his theme for his song.



Meet the Orchestra By: Ann Hayes

This story is about the audience, the composers, and the instruments. Here, readers will learn a little bit about the entire orchestra atmosphere (except the characters are animals).



Zin! Zin! Zin! A Violin By: Lloyd Moss

Readers will get a glimpse of the different instruments that are played in the orchestra. Also, the students will be introduced to the words used in the musical atmosphere.

Indiana State Standards: Language Arts

Grade 3: 3.1.2, 3.1.3, 3.1.4, 3.1.5, 3.1.6, 3.1.7, 3.2.2, 3.2.3, 3.2.4, 3.3.1, 3.3.3, 3.3.4, 3.3.8

Grade 4: 4.1.1, 4.1.2, 4.1.3, 4.1.5, 4.1.7, 4.2.2, 4.2.3, 4.3.1, 4.3.2, 4.3.3, 4.3.6, 4.3.7

Grade 5: 5.1.1, 5.1.6, 5.2.3, 5.2.4, 5.3.1, 5.3.2, 5.3.3, 5.3.4, 5.3.8

Grade 6: 6.1.4, 6.2.7, 6.2.9, 6.3.1, 6.3.2, 6.3.5, 6.3.6, 6.3.8, 6.3.9

Indiana State Standards: Music

Grade 3: 3.2.1, 3.2.4, 3.6.1, 3.6.3, 3.6.4, 3.6.6, 3.8.1

Grade 4: 4.5.5, 4.6.3, 4.6.5, 4.6.7

Grade 5: 5.6.2, 5.6.3, 5.6.4, 5.7.4

Grade 6: 6.6.2, 6.6.3

Across the Curriculum Connections

Activity 1: Music

- ❖ Create a short rhapsody with familiar rhythms from a few known songs.
 - You may pick three or more kinds of songs to combine.
 - You don't have to be able to play the whole song.
 - You must be able to tell what three songs you are trying to put together.

Materials Needed:

- Music to choose from
- Instruments to choose from

Music Standards:

Grade 3: 3.3.2, 3.4.1, 3.4.2, 3.4.3, 3.4.5

Grade 4: 4.2.1, 4.2.4, 4.3.1, 4.3.3

Grade 5: 5.2.1, 5.2.4, 5.3.1, 5.3.3, 5.3.4

Grade 6: 6.3.1, 6.3.3, 6.3.4, 6.4.2

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Activity #2: Music

- ❖ Compare and contrast the different kinds of musical performances after listening to them.

Materials Needed:

- Other musical performances
- Paper or a chart
- Pencil

Music Standards:

Grade 3: 3.6.1, 3.6.3, 3.6.4, 3.6.5, 3.7.2, 3.7.3

Grade 4: 4.6.1, 4.6.3, 4.6.5, 4.7.2

Grade 5: 5.5.2, 5.6.1, 5.6.2, 5.6.3, 5.6.4, 5.7.1, 5.9.3, 5.9.4

Grade 6: 6.5.2, 6.6.1, 6.6.2, 6.6.3, 6.7.2, 6.8.1, 6.8.2

Resources to Supplement Activities

Bach, Johann Sebastian, Georges Bizet, Johannes Brahms, Frederic Chopin, George Fredrick Handel, et al. 25 Classical Favorites. Perf. Frank Morelli. Cond. Alberto Lizzio, Alfred Scholz, Anton Nanut, Carl Michalski, Dalia Atlas, et al. Vox, 1996.

*A CD that has numerous classical songs by numerous musicians and composers.

Gershwin, George. Gershwin Greatest Hits. Perf. George Duvivier, Bobby Rosengarden, Boston Pops Orchestra, Earl Wild, and Peter Nero. Cond. Arthur Fiedler. RCA, 1991.

*A CD with George Gershwin's songs redone by various other musicians.

Book Activities

Activity #1: Journal Entry, Individual Assignment

Directions: Write a journal entry about how you compare yourself to *George Gershwin*. Include details about yourself and how they are like or unlike *Gershwin*.

- Example: Do you like/dislike the same things
- Example: Do you work/not work the same
- You must explain why or why not!

*Be sure to use neat handwriting and the grammar rules learned in class!

State Standards: Language Arts

Grade 3: 3.4.3, 3.4.9, 3.4.6, 3.4.7, 3.4.8, 3.5.2, 3.5.7, 3.6.1, 3.6.2, 3.6.3, 3.6.4, 3.6.5, 3.6.7, 3.6.8

Grade 4: 4.4.2, 4.4.10, 4.4.11, 4.4.12, 4.5.1, 4.5.2, 4.6.1, 4.6.2, 4.6.3, 4.6.4, 4.6.6, 4.6.7, 4.6.8

Grade 5: 5.4.2, 5.4.8, 5.4.9, 5.4.10, 5.5.1, 5.5.2, 5.6.8, 5.6.3, 5.6.4, 5.6.6, 5.6.7

Activity #2: Biography of *George Gershwin*, Partner Assignment

Directions: Research and write a biography on *George Gershwin*.

- Include an opening paragraph
- Include early life, middle life, and later life (three detail paragraphs)
- Include the closing paragraph
- Be sure to use neat handwriting and correct grammar

State Standards: Language Arts

Grade 3: 3.4.3, 3.4.9, 3.4.4, 3.5.2, 3.5.8

Grade 4: 4.4.3, 4.4.4, 4.4.7, 4.5.6, 4.5.3

Grade 5: 5.4.3, 5.4.5, 5.5.6, 5.5.3

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Informal Bibliography

Book reference: <http://www.langtoninfo.co.uk/showitem.asp?isbn=1570915563>

Book and CD reference: <http://amazon.com>

Publisher's Webpage: <http://www.charlesbridge.com>

Indiana Department of Education (Standards) Website:
<http://ideanet.doe.state.in.us/standards/welcom.html>

Dictionary:

"Michael Agnes." Webster's New World College Dictionary. 4th ed. 1999.