

Sweethearts of Rhythm:
The Story of the Greatest All-Girl Swing Band in the World
by Marilyn Nelson (author) and Jerry Pinkney (illustrator)
A Choose to Read Ohio Toolkit



About the Book

Sweethearts of Rhythm is a history in poems about a fascinating all-female jazz band. In the 1940s, as the world was at war, a remarkable jazz band performed on the American home front. The International Sweethearts of Rhythm, originating at a boarding school in the heart of Mississippi, found its way to the most famous ballrooms in the country, offering solace during the hard years of the

war. They dared to be an interracial group despite the cruelties of Jim Crow laws, and they dared to assert their talents though they were women in a “man’s” profession. Told in thought-provoking poems and arresting images, this unusual look at our nation’s history is deep and inspiring.

Sweethearts of Rhythm by Marilyn Nelson, illustrated by Jerry Pinkney. Copyright © 2009. Jacket image and book description used with permission of Dial Books for Young Readers, a division of Penguin Young Readers Group.

Book details:

Sweethearts of Rhythm: The Story of the Greatest All-Girl Swing Band in the World by Marilyn Nelson, illustrated by Jerry Pinkney.

Dial Books, 2009, ISBN 978-0-8037-3187-5, Grades 4-up.

<http://us.penguin.com/nf/Book/BookDisplay/0,,9780803731875,00.html>

About the Author

Marilyn Nelson is an award-winning poet for both adults and young adults. She was born in Cleveland and brought up on military bases. Nelson started writing while still in elementary school. She earned her B.A. from the University of California, Davis, and holds postgraduate degrees from the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Minnesota. In 2001 she was appointed the Poet Laureate of the State of Connecticut,



created by the General Assembly to recognize a Connecticut poet of the highest distinction. Some of the honors for her books include three National Book Award Finalists, a Newbery Honor, a Printz Honor, and a Boston-Horn Book award winner. She lives in Connecticut and is a professor of English at the University of Connecticut.

Author biography courtesy Penguin Young Readers Group; used with permission; plus excerpt adapted from Poets.org biography of Marilyn Nelson, <http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/97>. Photograph courtesy Blue Flower Arts, LLC, <http://www.blueflowerarts.com/>.

Author Resources:

Marilyn Nelson's Official Website

http://www.soulmountainretreat.org/marilyn_nelson.html

Marilyn Nelson is the founder and executive director of Soul Mountain Retreat.

Marilyn Nelson page on Blue Flower Arts site

<http://bit.ly/bK1la7>

Marilyn Nelson page on Poets.org site

<http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/97>

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See also:

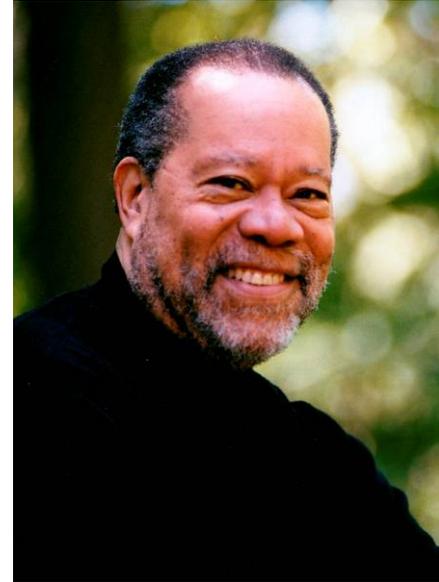
Arrange an Author Appearance with Penguin Young Readers Group

<http://www.penguin.com/authorappearances>

About the Illustrator

Jerry Pinkney has been illustrating children's books since 1964 and has the rare distinction of being the recipient of the Caldecott Medal (for ***The Lion and the Mouse***), five Caldecott Honor Medals, four Coretta Scott King Award Honor Medals, five Coretta Scott King Awards, four *New York Times* Best Illustrated Awards (most recently for ***The Little Red Hen***), four Gold and four Silver medals from the Society of Illustrators, and a Boston Globe-Horn Book Honor Book Award (for ***John Henry***).

In addition to his work in children's books, Mr. Pinkney has illustrated for a wide variety of clients, including *National Geographic*, the National Parks Service, the U.S. Postal Service, the American Library Association, and the Association of Booksellers for Children. He also was one of the official NASA-sponsored artists hired to commemorate the space shuttle Columbia launch in 1982. He has been an art professor at both the University of Delaware and the State University of New York at Buffalo and a guest lecturer at schools across the country. Jerry and his wife Gloria live in Westchester County, New York. They have four children.



Illustrator biography and photograph courtesy Penguin Young Readers Group; used with permission.

Illustrator Resources:

Jerry Pinkney's official website

<http://www.jerrypinkneystudio.com/>

Jerry Pinkney page on Penguin website

<http://us.penguin.com/nf/Author/AuthorPage/0,,1000013120,00.html>

Interview with Jerry Pinkney from Reading Rockets (video and text)

<http://www.readingrockets.org/books/interviews/pinkneyj>



<http://oh.webjunction.org/ohctrointro>

Learn & have fun!

Teachers: *These activities align to Ohio Academic Content Standards as indicated in parentheses after each activity. These are examples. Other content standards may also apply.*

Kids, parents, and others: *These ideas are useful for library programs, family activities, and other projects. Academic content standards define what students in K-12 should know and be able to do at each grade. They are included for teachers who want to use this book in school. For more information on the Ohio Academic Content Standards, see the Ohio Department of Education website at <http://www.ode.state.oh.us> and click on "Academic Content Standards" in the Educators section.*

- The poems in this collection tell the story of a big band from the imagined perspective of its instruments. Brainstorm people in occupations, besides musicians, that might be identified by the objects they carry: for example, painter (paintbrush), soldier (weapon), quarterback (football). Next, select a living or historical figure in one of these occupations. Research his or her life using library resources such as Biography Reference Bank, available to students through INFOhio (<http://www.infohio.org/>) and to all Ohio residents through Ohio Web Library (<http://www.ohioweblibrary.org/>). Incorporating the biographical information, compose a poem about the person from the perspective of the object he or she carries. *(ELA Writing Applications 3-4, 5-7; ELA Research 3-4, 5-7 ; Library Technology Literacy 3-5, 6-8)*
- Review the chronology of the International Sweethearts of Rhythm, at the end of the book. Use the timeline tool in World Book Student to create a timeline from this chronology. World Book Student is available through INFOhio and Ohio Web Library (see above activity for links). While using this resource, research other 20th century events that may relate to the history of this band. See the discussion topics below for some ideas. Add at least three additional events to your timeline. *(SS History 3-5, 6-8 Benchmark A; Library Technology Literacy 3-5, 6-8)*
- Read the Author's Note at the end of the book, and resources in the bibliography in the book and in the "Explore More" section of this toolkit, to learn more about the International Sweethearts of Rhythm. In small groups of 3-6 people, write a brief one-act play dramatizing the history of the band, or exploring a real or imagined incident in the life of the band. Rehearse and perform your play for your class or group. *(A Drama/Theatre Creative Expression and Communication 5-8; ELA Research 3-4, 5-7)*
- **Sweethearts of Rhythm** can be a springboard for class or group discussion or for research projects on many topics, including:
 - Women, capacity, and opportunity
 - World War II and the home front
 - The Great Depression
 - Jim Crow laws, racism, and race relations in 20th century America
 - The history, and social and musical influence, of jazz*Projects can align to various benchmarks in Arts: Music, Social Studies, and English Language Arts.*

Activities developed by the State Library of Ohio.



<http://oh.webjunction.org/ohctrointro>

Explore more!

International Sweethearts of Rhythm - 4 numbers

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpNjAmQmq90>

Historical video footage of the International Sweethearts of Rhythm in performance.

All About Jazz: International Sweethearts of Rhythm

<http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/musician.php?id=7874>

JazzNotes from Riverwalk Jazz: International Sweethearts of Rhythm

http://www.riverwalkjazz.org/jazznotes/intl_sweethearts/

Chatting About Books: Swing, Jitterbug, and Sing the Blues

<http://bit.ly/bkxH6v> (opens Read Write Think site)

A book chat podcast featuring *Sweethearts of Rhythm* and a conversation with Marilyn Nelson and Jerry Pinkney

The Poetry of Music: An Interview with Marilyn Nelson (from *School Library Journal*)

<http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/CA6702355.html>

PBS Kids Go: Jazz

<http://pbskids.org/jazz/>

History of Jazz from Scholastic.com

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

Jazz Profiles from NPR: Women in Jazz

http://www.npr.org/programs/jazzprofiles/archive/women_1.html

When Women Called the Tunes; Rediscovering the Players Who Kept Things Swinging After the Men Went to War (review of Sherrie Tucker's *Swing Shift*, by Dinitia Smith)

<http://nyti.ms/bBPxXX> (opens New York Times site)

Women's History from the National Archives

<http://www.archives.gov/research/alic/reference/womens-history.html>

A collection of historical websites relevant to women in the United States.

About Choose to Read Ohio

Choose to Read Ohio (CTRO) spotlights Ohio authors and promotes reading across Ohio. The State Library of Ohio, in partnership with Ohioana Library Association, developed this initiative to encourage Ohioans of all ages to share literature by authors native to, residing in, or associated with Ohio. CTRO is adaptable for use in classrooms, libraries, bookstores, by book discussion groups, families, and other community groups.

Explore Choose to Read Ohio resources & toolkits: <http://oh.webjunction.org/ohctrointro>.