

Gratitude is what I felt upon reading Walter Dean Myers's *Blues Journey* for the first time. What a beautiful way to honor those for whom these stories ring true and whose roots are intertwined with the blues. As I read, I imagined Myers setting the stage for a performance in a smoky lounge in Chicago: the artist, a mic, and a guitar strum filling the room with melodic blues licks. The performance creates a connection between the artist and the audience: the mutual desire to lay down burdens, and the joy in doing so. Unsurprisingly, *Blues Journey* was met with praise by Janice Del Negro in the *Bulletin*, though the review mentions disjointedness between the illustrations and accompanying lyrics and I do agree. However, taking the time to read between the lines reveals the clever use of discontinuity as a sly literary device; if I had to pick out one favorite part of this book, it would be the artists' generous gift of "A-ha" moments, even in a book filled with stories so blue.

Myers' concise explanation of the origin and evolution of the blues provides enough background information to support the text. Key elements are entangled: call and response is rooted in African heritage; the coded language that you encounter in blues lyrics is a nod to Negro spirituals sang by slaves whose language was taken and for whom literacy was withheld. I catch myself using the past tense as if the blues were a thing of the past, but the truth is, much of the content is still relevant because racism, glaring inequities, and even news of lynching continue to occur, in barbaric displays of violence or yet another video of police killing Black women, men, and children. Decidedly, stories like these that talk of "strange fruit hanging, high in a big oak tree" remain relevant. Myers mentions the impact of current events on the blues' evolution, and hopefully now that Juneteenth is recognized as a new national holiday it will remain meaningful as a reminder of a part of American history, destined to find its way on the lips of blues lyricists of the future.

Although *Blues Journey* is a picture book that you would find in the children's section, part of what makes this book necessary is that it transcends age limits, and, like the blues, it knows no boundaries. Teachers of music, history, literature, and art would love this book because it's filled with opportunities for lessons on the origins and evolution of the blues (why the genre exists), flexing analytical skills with close readings and interpretations of the artist's visual stories, and a classic model of how it feels to set words to rhythm.

- *Quinita Balderson, Reviewer*