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SWING SISTERS THE STORY OF THE INTERNATIONAL SWEETHEARTS OF RHYTHM

by Karen Deans
illustrated by Joe Cepeda



GRADES
K-3

ABOUT THE BOOK

The true story of how the talented members of the International Sweethearts of Rhythm, an integrated, barrier-breaking, all-female big band, overcome racism and sexism through music is told in this nonfiction picture book that comes alive with a text and art that swings.

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Literature/Language Arts

Vocabulary—Students may be unfamiliar with some of the terms used in the book: *brass*, *conductor*, *jazz*, *melody*, *multiracial*, *rhythm*, *swing (music)*, *tempo* and *woodwind*. Discuss these terms and their meanings with students prior to reading the book for maximum understanding of the story. [CCSS K.RL.4, L.2.4](#)

Fiction vs. Nonfiction—Explain to students that this is a work of *nonfiction*, meaning it is based on actual facts and events that really happened as opposed to *fiction*, which denotes a story that comes from an author’s imagination. Ask them to think of other books they know and to determine whether they are fiction or nonfiction. Create a classroom chart with two columns: FICTION and NONFICTION. And as students read or become familiar with more books, they can add the titles to the appropriate category on the chart. [CCSS 1.RL.5](#)

Compare and Contrast—The beginning of the book describes the girls’ lives at Piney Woods Country Life School. Ask students to compare the girls’ activities at the school with their own lives. How are they the same or different? How would they feel if they lived at a similar school?

Illustrations—There are several illustrations in the book with no text on the page. Ask students to describe what is occurring in these pictures. Encourage them to look at details and be as specific as possible in their descriptions. Their descriptions can be either oral or written, depending upon their abilities. They might even want to create dialog for the people depicted in the illustrations and act out what is transpiring. [CCSS 2.RL.7, 2.RL.6](#)

Social Issues—Several social issues are portrayed in the story: 1) Women not getting paid as much as men for the same work; 2) Jim Crow laws and “Colored” signs in many of the cities on the Swing Sisters’ tours; 3) White members of the group having to pretend they were black to avoid being arrested. Give students an opportunity to discuss these issues and how they feel about them. What opinions do they have? What differences do they see between life in the 1930s and ’40s and life today? [CCSS 2.RL.3, 2.SL.1, 2.W.1](#)

Online Resources

Piney Woods School—<http://pineywoods.org/about-us/history-piney-woods-school> presents a history of the school, established in 1909 and still functioning today, and http://theoldentimes.com/pineywoods_sch_pc.html shows an aerial view of the school.

The Sweethearts Music—www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpNjAmQmq90 presents a 1946 film clip of the band playing.

The Sweethearts today—https://youtube.com/watch?v=_Cjmg8Jepvw presents a panel discussion with five of the members of the Sweethearts—ages 86–91—from an event in April 2011 at the Smithsonian Museum of American History. The text below the video presents some additional information about the group.

Classroom Activities prepared by Sandy Schuckett, school library consultant.

About the Author



Karen Deans is the author of *Playing to Win: The Story of Althea Gibson*, illustrated by Elbrite Brown. She is also an artist whose favorite medium is oil paint on panel. Karen lives with her husband and three children in the Washington, DC area.

About the Illustrator



Joe Cepeda is an award-winning illustrator of more than twenty books for children. He lives in Southern California with his wife and their son. Visit his website at www.joecepeda.com.