

When viewing *Telling Stories: Christopher Myers* and participating in this guide's suggested activities, the following language arts standards sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association will be addressed: 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, 11.

Telling Stories: Christopher Myers

Friday, November 2, 2007

11 a.m. – 12 p.m.ET

Grades 5-8

Background Information

Born to Tell Stories

Perhaps Christopher Myers was born curious, or maybe his curiosity intensified because he grew up in a family of storytellers where the commonplace became spine-tingling. He recalls the excitement as he listened to vividly told stories by his grandfather

as well as those told and read to him by his father. Christopher's father, award-winning author Walter Dean Myers, influenced his love of stories and language, while his mother, Connie, encouraged Christopher's art.



Walter recalls Christopher reading before entering kindergarten and drawing on a daily basis by the time he was nine years old. When Christopher was still a toddler, his father decided to write full-time

and encouraged Christopher's involvement in all aspects of writing. This clearly helped the younger Myers to realize that books are created by real people, that everyone has a story to tell.

Christopher Myers tells his stories using the tools of an artist, sometimes creating his own words, sometimes telling stories visually that have been written by others, most notably his father.

Christopher's work has received many awards, including the Coretta Scott King Award, a Caldecott Honor, and a *Boston Globe*/Horn Book award. His stories often reflect the urban neighborhoods where he grew up (in Queens, NY, and Jersey City, NJ). Christopher is a graduate of Brown University and he completed an independent study at the Whitney Museum of American Art. He currently lives in Brooklyn, NY.

Stretching Boundaries: Visual Storytelling

There are many ways to tell stories. Writers use words, musicians may use an instrument; dancers use movement. Christopher Myers uses the tools of an artist. He is accomplished in many media, including photography, collage, and mixed media, using art to enhance poetry, novels, folktales, and more.

Readers swing, sway, and move to the rhythms of *Jazz*, in which paintings tell a story beyond the poetic text, as do the illustrations on brown paper for a stunning *Blues Journey*. Travel to *Harlem*, to experience the "...sound,/Celebration,/Memories of feelings, of place"—evocatively portrayed in ink, paint, and collage or tour Harlem with a *Black Cat* in a montage of words and visual impressions of this urban landscape.

Difficult themes in sophisticated novels such as *Monster* and *Autobiography of My Dead Brother* are extended by Christopher Myers' images much like the stylized, full-color illustrations that make clear the humor and wisdom in Zora Neale Hurston's *Lies & Other Tall Tales*.

The art of Christopher Myers tells stories of the past, the present, and more using innovative combinations of styles and media to resonate with readers of many ages.

About the Program

Christopher Myers will talk about his work in a discussion moderated by Maria Salvatore, a professor of children's literature. In addition to discussing his award-winning books, Myers will talk about the impact and need to record stories, the process he uses, his recent work, and how he approaches his work.



Instructional Activities

Reading

Read *Harlem* and *Black Cat*. Compare the styles of language and illustration used in both. The settings are similar, but the tone of each differs. Describe how this difference is created. Is this due to a shift in the *point of view*? How does the artist use point of view in each of these books? The author?

Research/History

Find a collection of folk tales collected by Zora Neale Hurston. Consider why Hurston is considered a significant author. What other tales might be translated into a format like the one used by Myers? Explore art and illustration of that period. How does it differ from Myers's work? What, if anything, is similar to his artistic style? Writing style?

What are some of Hurston's other accomplishments? How do they relate to her interest in traditional tales?

Writing

Using either *Blues Journey* or *Jazz* to launch your work, write a poem that emulates a form of jazz.

Art

Identify a tale or the lyrics of a jazz composition. Perhaps while listening to the music, illustrate it in a style that emulates the period in which it was first written.

Resources

Internet

For more information, connect to:
pbs.org/jazz/

Lesson plans for teachers:
lkwdpl.org/wihohio/hurs-zor.htm

Zora Neal Hurston and her work:
fatherryan.org/harlemrenaissance/

The Harlem Renaissance:
metmuseum.org/toah/ht/11/na/ht11na.htm
kennedy-center.org/pwttv

Select Bibliography

Written & Illustrated by Christopher Myers

Black Cat (Scholastic, 1999)

Fly! (Hyperion/Jump at the Sun, 2001)

Wings (Scholastic, 2000)

Illustrated by Christopher Myers

POETRY

Blues Journey written by Walter Dean Myers
(Holiday House, 2003)

Harlem written by Walter Dean Myers
(Scholastic, 1997)

Jabberwocky by Lewis Carroll (Jump at the Sun/Hyperion, 2007)

Jazz written by Walter Dean Myers (Holiday House, 2006)

NOVELS

Autobiography of My Dead Brother written by Walter Dean Myers (Amistad/HarperCollins, 2003)

Monster written by Walter Dean Myers
(Amistad/HarperCollins, 1999)

FOLKLORE

Lies and Other Tall Tales collected by Zora Neale Hurston, retold & illustrated by Christopher Myers (HarperCollins, 2005)