

# Rap A Tap Tap

by Leo and Diane Dillon • Scholastic, 2002



Reviewed by  
Mary Johns

This book, winner of a Coretta Scott King Honor award, is about the African American tap dancer, Bill “Bojangles” Robinson, who was popular during the 1920s and ’30s.

Its Caldecott Medal-winning authors, Leo and Diane Dillon, have captured the sheer joy and passion of Bojangles, the man who made “art with his feet.”

The bold, dynamic illustrations, done in a gouache painting technique, are the highlight of the book. They show Bojangles dancing his way across the streets of New York City; at a bus stop, in front of a theater with people dressed in fancy clothes, by a street market, at store fronts, and with neighborhood bands and street musicians. In all kinds of weather, ordinary people in the streets – including well-dressed folks with umbrellas over their heads and poor people trying to stay warm in the frigid winter – line up to watch him dance. The pictures show how people were captivated by his charm, personality and energetic dancing. The illustrations even capture Bojangles in motion, his lightning-quick footwork depicted by his legs and feet in various shades of color. These shadow images, set against a white background, suggest a sense of movement and create an eye-catching image of dance.

This sense of movement is enhanced by the rhythmic motion in the call-and-response text. Throughout the book each rhyming phrase is followed by the same response, “Rap a tap tap - think of that!” For example, when Bojangles dances along with the rhythms of street musicians, the text reads, “He danced many rhythms that were seldom the same. Rap a tap tap - think of that!” On the following page Bojangles is shown performing in a movie theater to a wildly cheering audience with these words: “Dance

was his passion, and it brought him fame. *Rap a tap tap - think of that!*” Even very young children would enjoy chanting these bouncy rhythmic responses or creating their own version of Bojangles’ tapping feet.

From beginning to end, this book is filled with possibilities for creative movement. Imagine a room full of energetic tap dancers! However, it could also be used in the music classroom for rhythmic activities with unpitched percussion instruments or for rhythmic improvisation.

Although this isn’t a biography of Bill “Bojangles” Robinson, there is a short afterward that tells about his life. This information could easily lead to discussion about life during the Great Depression or about other tap dancers, such as Shirley Temple, who danced with Bill Robinson in the movies *The Little Colonel* and *The Littlest Rebel*. Powerful illustrations, catchy rhythms, a tribute to tap dancing. “Rap a tap tap - think of that!”

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