

Reviewed by Vivian Caputo

Everybody Gets the Blues

Written by Leslie Staub/Illustrated by R. G. Roth
New York, NY: HMH Books for Young Readers, 2012

What makes you feel blue? What makes you feel sad or mad? Is a personal challenge pulling you down? Did you have an argument with someone you really care about? Has violence occurred that frightens you? Have you been bullied, or is it just a grey day? Everybody gets the blues sometimes, even kids! The issues may be different, but we all have times when we feel alone and depressed. What can make us feel better?

Everybody Gets the Blues author Leslie Staub lived in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina. Experiencing both the trauma of the natural disaster and the solace of support from others inspired this book. Readers may already be familiar with Staub as the illustrator of *Whoever You Are*, by Mem Fox, and as author and illustrator of *Bless This House*.

R. G. Roth illustrated *Busing Brewster* by Richard Michelson, and *This Jazz Man* by Karen Erhardt. In *Everybody Gets the Blues*, he combines soft, color-washed backgrounds, line drawings, and collage, and portrays background characters with sensitivity and, at times, whimsy.

When the boy in this story cries because he feels sad, the Blues Guy, who with his trumpet might be a New Orleans musician, comes along and sits beside him. The Blues Guy listens to the boy and sometimes talks and lets him know he understands how he feels. He tells the boy this happens to everybody now and then. They begin to sing, and singing lifts their spirits. Soon they find others who are crying and let them know they are not alone. Then they all sing together, and soon the tears pass and everyone feels better. They say goodbye to the blues and to the Blues Guy, until they meet again.

Although some of the text is rhythmic, it is not consistent and the words do not fall into a classic blues pattern. Rather, it provides a springboard for discussing unhappy feelings. In the classroom, explore questions such as, "Why was the boy crying?" "What is 'the blues'?" With your help,

younger students can then create a typical 12-bar blues song with a basic harmonic pattern of I I I I IV IV I I V IV I I. If you are comfortable playing either guitar or piano, you might improvise a blues song over those chord changes, using topics the children suggest, with an A A B form for the words.

Often blues songs feature topics inappropriate for children. If you need child-friendly blues examples, *Even Kids Get the Blues*, a CD by The Re-Bops, has some excellent blues songs written for and sung by children. The songs were inspired by situations children said made them feel sad or mad. They are well arranged and have a great groove, and the children's singing is fun and engaging.

Doug Goodkin's *Just In Time* and *All Blues* also provide excellent artistic guidance. In addition, check out YouTube to view Conan O'Brien singing with first graders in Chicago, and B. B. King singing and playing *One Shoe Blues* by Sandra Boynton. These resources, along with the charming story and beautiful illustrations in *Everybody Gets the Blues*, provide tools you can use to banish the blues from the elementary classroom. ■

VIVIAN MURRAY CAPUTO has taught in public and private schools. She has presented workshops for NAfME, AOSA chapters and conferences, and is an Orff Schulwerk teacher education instructor. She served on the AOSA National Board of Trustees as Region V representative and as co-chair of the 2005 AOSA National Professional Development Conference. Vivian has been an instructor for IAJE Teacher Training Institutes, and performs with various jazz ensembles.

