

TEACHER'S GUIDE



LEE & LOW BOOKS



Drummer Boy of John John

written by Mark Greenwood

illustrated by Frané Lessac

About the Book

Genre: Historical Fiction

***Reading Level:** Grade 2–3

Interest Level: Grades K–5

Guided Reading: J

Accelerated Reader® Level/

Points: 4.1/0.5

Lexile™: AD820L

* Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

Themes: Music (Drumming), Creativity, Working Toward a Goal, Cultural Traditions, Caribbean Music and Lifestyle, History, Self-Control/Self-Regulation, African/African American Interest

SYNOPSIS

Carnival is coming, and the villagers of John John, Trinidad, are getting ready to jump up and celebrate with music, dancing, and a parade. Best of all, the Roti King has promised free rotis—tasty fried pancakes filled with chicken, herbs, and spices—for the best band in the parade.

Young Winston dreams of feasting on those delicious rotis. But there's a problem: he's not in a band! Pondering his predicament as he wanders through the village junkyard, Winston makes a curious musical discovery that may be just the ticket to realizing his dream. With ingenuity and the help of his friends, Winston takes on the Carnival bands, drumming his way to victory—and to the Roti King's prized treat.

Musical text and sun-drenched paintings joyously transport readers to the Caribbean, and to this exuberant story inspired by the early life of Winston "Spree" Simon, a pioneer in the development of the steel drum.

Awards and honors include:

- **"Choices,"** Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC)
- **Best Children's Books of the Year,** Bank Street College of Education
- **Américas Award Commended Titles,** Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs
- **Best Books of the Year,** Kirkus Reviews



BACKGROUND

Trinidad's Carnival: Trinidad and Tobago is a country made up of two islands in the Caribbean, off the coast of Venezuela. The island of Trinidad is known for its lively Carnival in the capital city of Port of Spain. Celebrated on the Monday and Tuesday before Lent, Carnival is a giant street party. Preparations for the celebration, which includes elaborate costumes, dancing and band competitions, begin months ahead of time.

Roti: Roti is a popular fast food in Trinidad and Tobago and other nearby countries. There are many different kinds; typically roti includes curried vegetables and meats wrapped in bread, burrito style. The bread (“roti skin”) is made from wheat flour, salt, water, and sometimes butter. It is cooked on a stovetop griddle called a tava. Videos of roti preparation and more information can be found here:

<http://www.trinigourmet.com/index.php/trinidadian-roti-an-overview/>.

Winston “Spree” Simon and the Steel Drum (Excerpted From the Author’s Note): This story was inspired by the early life of Winston “Spree” Simon (1927–1976), a pioneer in the development of the steel drum, or pan. The proud villagers of John John, Trinidad, believe that Winston was the first person to play a tune on the instrument, although he never claimed that distinction. He drummed on discarded metal containers in the “John John Band.” One day he discovered that striking dents in a metal pan produced various pings and pongs. By age nine, Winston was playing melodies on a four-note “ping-pong pan” in various street bands. During Carnival in the years that followed, the streets of John John resonated with clanging rhythms and melodies thumped out on old metal containers. Later Winston created an improved nine-note steel pan. He was selected into the Trinidad All Stars Percussion Orchestra, which toured London and Paris in 1951, introducing the steel drum to European audiences. Winston “Spree” Simon’s early instruments were made from old paint cans and biscuit tins. Today, the steel drum is the national instrument of Trinidad and Tobago, and steel drum orchestras symbolize the musical

culture of the Caribbean to the world. Winston received Trinidad and Tobago’s Public Service Medal of Merit in 1974 for his contribution to the development of the steel band. He is also honored by a monument in John John.

View several video clips of steel drum bands in this LEE & LOW blog post:

<http://blog.leeandlow.com/2012/09/07/the-steelpan-a-sound-of-trinidad-and-tobago/>.

Additional titles to teach about drums and community:

Drumbeat in Our Feet written by Patricia A. Keeler and Júlio Leitão, illustrated by Patricia A. Keeler
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2386>

Drum, Chavi, Drum!/Toca, Chavi, Toca! written by Mayra Dole, illustrated by Tonel
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2846>

Ten Oni Drummers written by Matthew Gollub, illustrated by Kazuko G. Stone
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2460>

Calling the Water Drum written by LaTisha Redding, illustrated by Aaron Boyd
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2940>

In the Time of the Drums written by Kim L. Siegelson, illustrated by Brian Pinkney
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2943>

Steel Drumming at the Apollo: The Raod to Super Top Dog written by Trish Marx, illustrated by Ellen B. Senisi
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2453>

Summoning the Phoenix: Poems and Prose About Chinese Musical Instruments written by Emily Jiang, illustrated by April Chu
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2841>



VOCABULARY

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 & 2)
(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 4)

The story contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below.

Encourage a variety of strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

Content Specific*

Calypso music, Carnival, roti, herbs and spices, chac-chac players, gourds, tamboo bamboo, bottle-and-spoon, orchestra, shango drummers, bass, high notes, low notes, pitch, "simple tune," mango, "merry melody," rubber, metal, limbo pole

*NOTE: See the glossary at the end of the book for definitions of many of these terms

Academic

tropical, village, toil, celebrate, pound, tones, struck, beat, flesh, hurl, ricochet, produce, hammer, various, chiming, clanging, drew out, curious, parade, mellow, assemble, chant, thunderous, rhythm, rattle, rustle, irresistible, crowned, feast, delicious

BEFORE READING

Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

1. Have you been to the Caribbean? If not, have you read any stories set there? What do you know about this part of the world?
2. Have you ever played an instrument? Have you ever turned an object you found into an instrument? How?
3. What do you know about drums? What materials or shapes might make a good drum?
4. How might someone prepare for a competition that he/she really wants to win?
5. As a hook for students, consider showing them the book trailer created by illustrator Frané Lessac posted on YouTube:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i97bfzAEhJw>

Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1, Craft & Structure, Strand 5, and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Talk about the title of the book. Then ask students what they think this book will most likely be about and whom the book might be about. What do they think might happen? What information do they think they might learn? What makes them think that?

Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, author and illustrators' dedications, illustrations, author's note, photograph of Winston "Spree" Simon, glossary and pronunciation guide, and author's sources.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out:

- how Winston becomes the Drummer Boy of John John and why his band are crowned the best band in the Carnival parade
- what Carnival is like on the island of Trinidad

Encourage students to consider why the author, Mark Greenwood, would want to share this story with young people.



AFTER READING

Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. **To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite evidence with their answers.**

Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. How do the villagers prepare for Carnival?
2. What does the Roti King say he will do? Why is he offering the prize? How does Winston feel about his announcement?
3. What kinds of instruments do the village musicians play? How do they sound?
4. What happens when Winston wanders to the junkyard? Why is Winston surprised?
5. What does Winston do with the old metal things he finds? Why?
6. How do Winston's friends react to the noise coming from the junkyard?
7. What do Winston and his friends do to prepare for Carnival?
8. How does the author describe Winston's band's music in the parade? How do the villagers respond when they hear it?
9. What happens after the parade?

Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Based on the text and illustrations, describe the village of John John. Describe the people who live there. What's important to them?

2. Compare and contrast the instruments each band uses. (NOTE: more information about the instruments can be found in the glossary.)
3. How does luck play a role in the creation of Winston's band? What other factors contribute to its creation? What are some of Winston's key character traits?
4. Why is winning the band competition so important to Winston and his friends? Why wouldn't they just buy roti?
5. What can you learn about Carnival in Trinidad from this book? Give examples from the text and illustrations.
6. How do the author's descriptions of musical sounds contribute to the mood of the story?
7. What words in the text describe how the drum sounds?
8. How do you think the musicians in this book wanted their music to make people feel?
9. How is the music featured in *Drummer Boy of John John* different from other kinds of music you have heard?
10. How does music create or encourage community and teamwork?
11. What traits does someone need to become a successful musician?
12. What does it mean for a book to be "inspired" by a true story? Based on the information in the author's note, what information in the book is true? What parts might the author have added or changed?

Reader's Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4 and 6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. **Suggest that students respond in reader's response journals, essays, or oral discussion.** You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.



★ “The sounds are wondrously irresistible. . . . The text is filled with a cacophony of musical words that are fun and challenging to read aloud. . . . A joy to read. Play calypso music and celebrate!”

–*Kirkus Reviews, starred review*

“Funky onomatopoeia should give out-loud readings pizzazz. . . and dynamic type makes the words shimmy on the page. Valuable both for its portrait of a child inventor and a vibrant community of color.”

–*Publishers Weekly*

“This title’s thumping sounds and rhythms will have even young preschoolers joining in the drumming action in this true story of a young boy. . . .

Great for sharing in the classroom, kids will want to read this many times over.”

–*Booklist*

1. Winston wants to win the band competition to get a free roti. Do you think this is his only motivation? If you were faced with a challenging task, what would motivate you to succeed?
 2. Write about a time when you got a great idea for solving a problem. What was the problem? What was your idea and how did you think of it? Did it work? Did you work on it alone or with others?
 3. What role do Winston’s friends play in this story? How might the story have turned out differently if they’d had a different reaction to the sounds coming from the junkyard? What does it feel like to have friends encourage or join you? Give an example from your own life.
 4. Winston and his friends make their own drums. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using a “Do It Yourself” (“DIY”) approach to accomplish a task?
 5. How is music important to the lives of people in John John? What role does music play in your life? Do you play or listen to music for certain reasons or during certain events?
 6. Why do you think people enjoy music and find it meaningful?
1. Assign ELL students to partner-read the book with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
 2. Have each student write three questions about the text. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
 3. Depending on students’ level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
 - Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
 - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the book or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.
 4. Have students give a short talk describing musical instruments. Provide pictures from the story or other sources to which students can refer.
 5. The story contains some content-specific words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students’ prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose English Language Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an

ELL/ESL Teaching Strategies

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)
(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Language Learners.



action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

English/Language Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3 and Craft and Structure, Strands 4 and 5)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production and Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

1. Explore the onomatopoeia in the story. Based on your students' needs, you might:
 - Practice reading musical sound words with certain phonetic patterns (e.g., -ap, -ack, -ing) and generating other words with the same pattern
 - Discuss how the author changed certain letters to make different sound words (e.g., clink, clank, clunk) and use phoneme or letter manipulation to create new words from the ones in the book.
 - Create new percussion sounds in your classroom and try to spell them phonetically.
2. Explore the verbs used to describe the musician's movements in the story. Act out shaking a chachac, pounding the ground, etc.
3. Re-read the author's description of Winston's band's performance in the parade. Make a list of the words and phrases that help the reader

visualize this event. Ask students to choose events from their lives to write about with similar precise and powerful language.

Science

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)
(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strand 2)

1. Experiment with creating high and low sounds. Describe each sound and discuss the factors that contribute to variation in pitch. This activity suggests using different sized cans to create drums with different pitches:
<http://www.education.com/science-fair/article/size-vibrating-surface-affect-pitch/>. Record findings using shared writing or in a science journal entry.
2. Bring in a mango to show your students. Talk about how the mango looks, feels, smells both whole and cut open. Talk about how it would feel to peel the mango with your teeth, like Winston! Dice the mango and let students try a piece and describe how it tastes. Record observations using shared writing or in a science journal entry.

Social Studies

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

1. Locate Trinidad on a map. Make observations about the geography of the Caribbean region. What would be unique about living on an island? Talk about the influences of other countries on the Caribbean countries and territories and locate those countries on the map as well. Find helpful information here:
<http://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/carib.htm>.
2. Explore the role of drum music in this story and other stories. Post a world map and note in which countries drums are found. Bring in other images of drums from around the world. How can drums help people communicate? What can someone communicate through a drum? How do the drums or music featured in these book create community? Why do you think so many cultures have created some form of drums?



Art/Media and Music

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)
(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

1. In this interview (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2813/interviews>) illustrator Frané Lessac says she, “wanted to capture the warmth of the people and the joy of color that embraces you on a Caribbean Island. With a text full of sounds and tastes, hopefully one is transported there at once.” Discuss her words with students. What aspects of the illustrations achieve this? Have students experiment with illustrating a place important to them using bold colors. Try using tempera paint, or a combination of watercolor and oil pastels, crayons or colored pencils. View a short video about how Frané Lessac creates her illustrations on her website, <http://www.franelessac.com/>.
2. Study examples in the book of how sound is represented in the illustrations and word art (e.g., the part when Winston’s friends hear him playing in the junkyard.) Play examples of various types of music and ask students to sketch visual representations of what they hear. Have students share their sketches with partners.
3. Study the carnival costumes in the story. Have students describe their various details. Make hats or masks inspired by the colors and shapes of those in the story. Find a template for mask-making here: <http://blog.leeandlow.com/2012/10/30/hurricane-crafts-how-to-make-a-paper-mask/>.
4. Discuss the features of a drum. What do drums around the world have in common? How are drums unique from other instruments? What materials are best for making drums? What geometric shapes are best for making drums?
5. Set up a listening station devoted to music including drums. Provide a range of musical genres. Leave covers available for students to explore. After students have an opportunity to listen to different kinds of music featuring or

including drums, encourage students to share their reactions in writing. What images did the music bring to them as they listened with their eyes closed? What did they imagine as they heard the drums?

6. Pair *Drummer Boy of John John* with a music recording of the music featured in the book. Encourage students to draw a picture that captures the mood, feeling, or story of the song as they listen. What colors would you use for each instrument and why? How would you draw a quiet, slow, fast, or loud moment?

Home-School Connection

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)
(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4 and 6)

1. Have each student search his or her home for potential “drums” and bring in a found or recycled container to create percussion instruments at school. Provide various implements for striking the containers (paintbrush, fork or spoon, stick, etc.) Compare the sounds produced. Examine the different materials and listen to the variety of different sounding drums. Which ones make metallic sounds, loud sounds, soft sounds, sweet sounds, deep sounds? How can you make the sound change?
2. Have students interview a family member or neighbor who plays an instrument. Generate a list of questions as a class to gather information about how the person became interested in the instrument, how the instrument works, etc. For students who are unsure who to interview, suggest the school music teacher or other staff member.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Greenwood is the author of numerous children's books published in both the United States and his native Australia, several of which were created in collaboration with his wife, illustrator Frané Lessac. Greenwood is also an accomplished drummer. His interest in world music and his frequent travels to the Caribbean led him to this story of a drummer boy based on the life of musician Winston "Spree" Simon. Greenwood and Lessac live in Fremantle, West Australia. Visit his website at markgreenwood.com.au.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Frané Lessac has illustrated more than forty books for young readers, several of which she has also written. Born in New Jersey, Lessac later lived on the island of Montserrat. Her time there inspired her to create many stories with Caribbean settings and themes. Working on *Drummer Boy of John John* gave Lessac an opportunity to visit the Caribbean again, to research her illustrations. She currently lives in Fremantle, West Australia, with her author husband. Visit her website at franellessac.com.

ABOUT LEE & LOW BOOKS

LEE & LOW BOOKS is the largest children's book publisher specializing in diversity and multiculturalism. Our motto, "about everyone, for everyone," is as urgent today as it was when we started in 1991. It is the company's goal to meet the need for stories that children of color can identify with and that all children can enjoy. The right book can foster empathy, dispel stereotypes, prompt discussion about race and ethnicity, and inspire children to imagine not only a world that includes them, but also a world where they are the heroes of their own stories. Discover more at leeandlow.com.

ORDERING INFORMATION

On the Web:

www.leeandlow.com/contact/ordering (general order information)

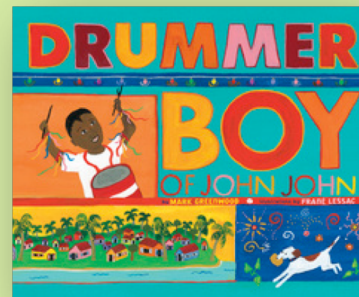
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2813> (secure online ordering)

By Phone: 212-779-4400 ext. 25

By Fax: 212-683-1894

By Mail: Lee & Low Books, 95 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

Book Information for *Drummer Boy of John John*



\$18.95, HARDCOVER
978-1-60060-652-6
40 pages, 10-5/16x 8-7/16
*Reading Level: Grades 2–3
*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula
Interest Level: Grades K–5
Guided Reading Level: J
Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 4.1/0.5
Lexile™ Measure: AD820L

THEMES: Music (Drumming), Creativity, Working Toward a Goal, Cultural Traditions, Caribbean Music and Lifestyle, History, Self-Control/Self-Regulation, African/African American Interest

RESOURCES ON THE WEB:

Learn more about *Drummer Boy of John John* at:

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2813>

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.