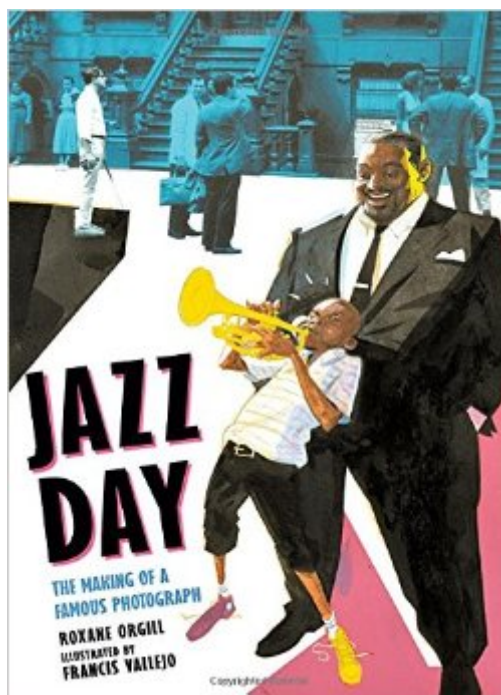


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# Jazz Day: The Making Of A Famous Photograph



## Synopsis

What happens when you invite as many jazz musicians as you can to pose for a photo in 1950s Harlem? Playful verse and glorious artwork capture an iconic moment for American jazz. When Esquire magazine planned an issue to salute the American jazz scene in 1958, graphic designer Art Kane pitched a crazy idea: how about gathering a group of beloved jazz musicians and photographing them? He didn't own a good camera, didn't know if any musicians would show up, and insisted on setting up the shoot in front of a Harlem brownstone. Could he pull it off? In a captivating collection of poems, Roxane Orgill steps into the frame of Harlem 1958, bringing to life the musicians' mischief and quirks, their memorable style, and the vivacious atmosphere of a Harlem block full of kids on a hot summer's day. Francis Vallejo's vibrant, detailed, and wonderfully expressive paintings do loving justice to the larger-than-life quality of jazz musicians of the era. Includes bios of several of the fifty-seven musicians, an author's note, sources, a bibliography, and a foldout of Art Kane's famous photograph.

## Book Information

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Best Sellers Rank: #110,400 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #6 in [Books > Children's Books > Arts, Music & Photography > Music > Jazz](#) #21 in [Books > Children's Books > Arts, Music & Photography > Photography](#) #191 in [Books > Children's Books > Biographies > Multicultural](#)

Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

## Customer Reviews

Summary: In 1958, graphic designer Art Kane sold Esquire on the idea of taking a picture of as many jazz musicians as he could gather together. Looking for the perfect backdrop, he traveled to Harlem, where he spent a full seeking the brownstone he wanted to use for the shot. Although he wasn't a professional photographer, Kane got his photo of 57 jazz musicians, now known as

Harlem 1958. This book tells the history of that day through poems about Kane and some of his subjects. Thelonius Monk was an hour late because he was picking out the perfect outfit to wear. Count Bassie explains many of the musicians' nicknames, including his own.

There's A Hole in the Picture• recounts the reason Duke Ellington is missing from the photo (he was on the road). Other poems are about lesser known performers, as well as some of the Harlem kids who ended up in the photo, lined up in the front row or peeking out the windows of the house. An oversized page near the end unfolds to finally reveal the photograph.

Back matter includes an extensive author's note, a picture identifying all the musicians, thumbnail biographies of all the subjects of the poems, and a huge bibliography. 66 pages; grades 4-7. Pros: This carefully researched, beautifully illustrated collection of poems requires a slow reading to take in all the information. Readers will find themselves flipping between the poems, the photo, and the back matter. 66 pages jam-packed with information, presented with enormous artistic flair. Cons: It's difficult to know who the audience would be for this book. Most kids in grades 4-7 won't have the context to really appreciate it, yet clearly, it's written for an upper elementary/middle school reader.

Some books for kids have a hard road ahead of them. Here's a secret. If you want a book to sell just oodles and oodles of copies to the general public, all you have to do is avoid writing in one of two specific genres: poetry and nonfiction. Even the best and brightest nonfiction books have a nasty tendency to fade from public memory too soon, and poetry only ever gets any notice during April a.k.a National Poetry Month. I say that, and yet there are some brave souls out there who will sometimes not just write poetry. Not just write nonfiction. They'll write nonfiction-inspired poetry. It's crazy! It's like they care about the quality of the content more than make a bazillion dollars or something. The latest book to fall into this category is *Jazz Day: The Making of a Famous Photograph* by Roxane Orgill. Melding topics like jazz musicians and photography with history, poetry, and some truly keen art, this isn't really like any other book on your shelves. I'm betting that that's a good thing too. It was sort of a crazy idea for a graphic designer / jazz buff to come up with. By 1958 jazz was a well-established, deeply American, musical genre. So why not try to get all the jazz greats, and maybe some up-and-comers, into a single photograph all together? The call went out but Art Kane (who really wasn't a photographer himself) had no idea who would turn up. After all, they were going to take the picture at ten in the morning. That's a time most jazz performers are fast asleep. Yet almost miraculously they came. Count Basie and Thelonious Monk. Maxine Sullivan and Dizzy Gillespie. Some of them were

tired. Some were having a great time catching up with old friends. And after much cajoling on Kane's part a photo was made. Fifty-seven musicians (fifty-eight if you count Willie "Lion" Smith just out of frame). Orgill tells the tale in poetry, with artist Francis Vallejo providing the art and life. Extensive backmatter consists of an Author's Note, Biographies, a page on the photo and homages to it, Source Notes, and a Bibliography that includes Books, Articles, Audiovisual Material, and Websites. Jazz is often compared to poetry. So giving this book too rigid a structure wouldn't offer the right feel at all. I'm no poet. I wish I had a better appreciation for the art than I do. Yet even with my limited understanding of the style I found myself stopping when I read the poem "This Moment" written from the point of view of Eddie Locke, a drummer. It's the kind of poem where it's composed as a series of quatrains. The second and fourth lines of each stanza are repeated as the first and third lines of the next. It was fortunate for me that Orgill mentions in the back of the book that the poem is a pantoum. I'd never have come up with that term myself (I thought it was a sestina). Most of the poetry in the book isn't really that formal. In fact, Orgill confesses that, "we write prose, not poetry. But this story demanded a sense of freedom, an intensity, and a conciseness that prose could not provide." The result is that most of the poems are free verse, which I much preferred. Did you know that when publishing a book for kids you're not supposed to turn in your manuscript with an illustrator already attached? True fact. Editors like having the power to pair authors and artists together. To be honest, they have experience in this area and sometimes their intervention is sublime (sometimes it fails miserably too, but that's a tale for another day). I'm afraid I don't know what Candlewick editor saw Orgill's manuscript and thought of Francis Vallejo as a potential illustrator. If I knew I'd kiss them. Detroit born Vallejo is making his debut with this book and you'd never know in a million years that he wasn't a born and bred Harlemit. His style is perfect for this tale. As adept at comic style panels as he is acrylic and pastel jazz scenes, there's life in this man's art. It was born to accompany jazz. It's also particularly interesting watching what he does with light. The very beginning of the book shows a sunrise coming up on a hot August day. As it rises, shadows make way. This play between light and shadow, between the heat of the photo shoot and the cool jazz clubs that occasionally make an appearance in the text, gives the book its heart. It's playful and serious all at once so that when you lift the page that reveals the real photograph, that action produces a very real moment of awe. There's been a lot of talk in the world of children's literature lately about the research done on both works of fiction and nonfiction. Anytime you set your book in the past you have a responsibility to get the facts right. Part

of what I love so much about Jazz Day is the extent of the research here. Orgill could easily have found a couple articles and books about the day of the photograph and stopped there. Instead, she writes that "Kane was by all accounts a wonderful storyteller, but one who did not always adhere to the facts. With the help of his son Jonathan Kane, I tried to set the story of the photograph straight."

• Instructors who are teaching about primary sources in the schools could use this anecdote to show how reaching out to primary sources is something you need to do all the time. The rest of the backmatter (and it really is some of the most extensive I've ever seen) would be well worth showing to kids as well. The question then becomes, whom is this book for? The complexity of the subject matter suggests that it's meant for older kids. Those kids that might have a sense of some of the history (they might have heard what jazz is or who Duke Ellington was at some point in their travels). But would they read it for pleasure or as a kind of assigned reading? I don't know. I certainly found it amusing enough, but I'm a 37-year-old woman. Not the target age range exactly. Yet I want to believe that there's a fair amount of kid-friendly material here. Poems like "So Glad" and "quartet" may be about adults talking from an adult perspective, but Orgill cleverly livens the book up with the perspective of kids every step of the way. From the children sitting bored on the curb to a girl peering down from her window wishing the jazz men and photographer would just go away, kids get to give their two cents constantly. Read it more than once and you'll begin to recognize some of them. Brothers Alfred and Nelson crop up more than a couple times too. Their mischief is just what the doctor ordered. With that in mind, it might be a good idea to have kids read different poems at different times. Save the more esoteric ones for later. Jazz is hard to teach to kids. They know it's important but it's hard to make it human. There are always exceptions, though. For example, my 20-month-old is so obsessed with the book *This Jazz Man* by Karen Ehrhardt that he'll have me read it to him a hundred times over. To my mind, that's what this book is capable of, if at a much older level. It humanizes the players and can serve as a starting point for discussions, teaching units, you name it. These men and women are hot and tired and laughing and alive, if only at this moment in time. It's a snapshot in both the literal and figurative sense. It'll take some work to get it into the right hands, I suspect, but in the end it's worth it. Jazz isn't some weird otherworldly language. It's people. These people. Now the kids in the book, and the kids reading this book, have a chance to get to know them. For ages 9-12.

What a delightful background piece on an iconic, inspired photo! It takes into account the humanity

of everyone involved in the making of history, not just some of the greatest musicians of the 20th Century (or ever), but the people of the neighborhood, and the photographer too. The artwork is simultaneously stunningly beautiful and brutally realistic. I would recommend this book for any child who loves music, as well as any adult who loves jazz.

Beautiful book and very well presented; however, I am not sure that children would be interested in the subject matter. It may be targeted for the 8-12 age range, but it's difficult to believe that most children would even know who any of these jazz greats are.\*\* I was provided with a complimentary copy of this book in exchange for an honest review \*\*

JAZZ DAY: THE MAKING OF A FAMOUS PHOTOGRAPH by Roxane Orgill tells the true story of a graphic designer who wanted to share his passion for jazz music through a photograph. This beautifully illustrated nonfiction picture book shares the story of how Art Kane invited jazz musicians to a photo session in Harlem. Told through engaging watercolor painting and lyrical verse, this page-turning story immerses readers in 1950s Harlem. From singers to musicians, many of the poems feature famous and everyday people who attended this special event. The Author's Note, Biographies, and other end notes add to the authenticity of the work. Librarians will find this unique book fits into a number of different situations. English teachers will be drawn to the verse, while history educators will enjoy the fascinating historical references. Librarians may wish to connect this book with primary source materials involving youth in comparing the photographs taken at the event with the picture book illustrations and story. Get children involved in learning more about the people in the photo. Also, think about ways to incorporate this book into an entire interdisciplinary music unit on jazz through history. Look for this book on the [Best of 2016](#) lists. To learn more about the author, go to [...] Published by Candlewick Press on March 8, 2016. ARC courtesy of the publisher.

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