

¡MAMBO Mucho MAMBO!

The Dance That Crossed Color Lines

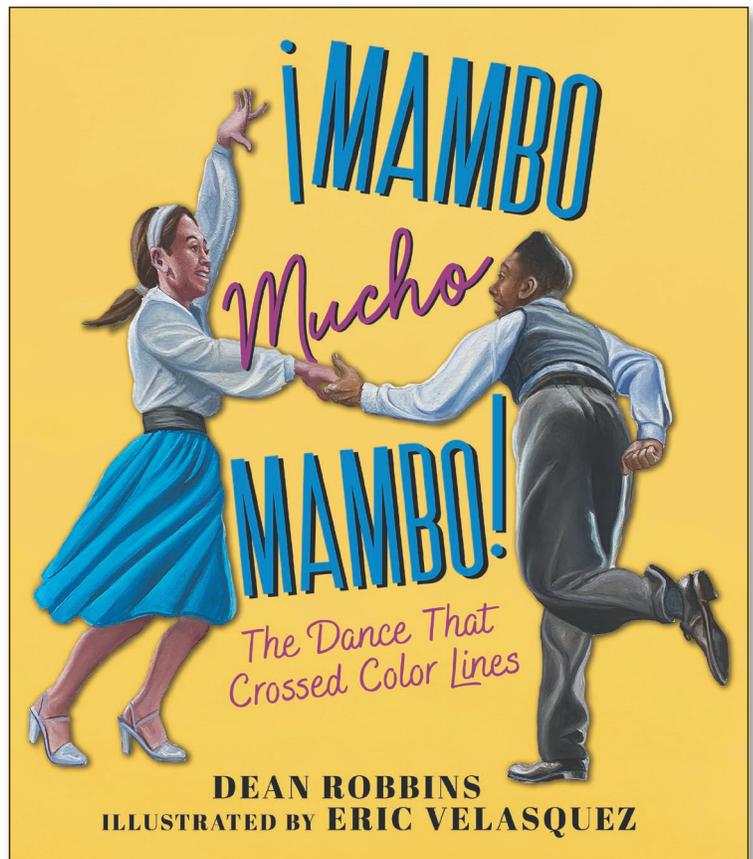
DEAN ROBBINS
 ILLUSTRATED BY
ERIC VELASQUEZ

ABOUT THE BOOK

It was the 1940s in New York City, and Millie and Pedro were forbidden to dance together, until first a band and then a ballroom broke the rules. Millie danced to jazz in her Italian neighborhood, and Pedro danced to Latin songs in his Puerto Rican side of town. Then a brand-new sound hit the scene, blending jazz trumpets and saxophones with Latin maracas and congas to create Latin jazz, music for the head, the heart, and the hips. And when the Palladium Ballroom issued a bold challenge to segregation and threw open its doors to all, a diverse group could join together to explore a thrilling new dance called the mambo, with Millie and Pedro leading the way. Illustrated with verve and told through real-life characters who feature in an afterword, *¡Mambo Mucho Mambo!* portrays the power of music and dance to transcend racial, religious, and ethnic boundaries.

Common Core Connections

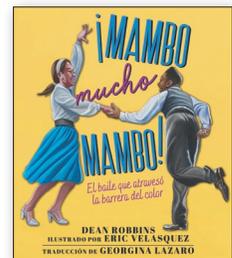
The discussion questions that follow invite young readers to explore Reading Literature skills based on the Common Core State Standards for grades 2–4. These skills will enable students to critically and comprehensively demonstrate their understanding by fostering discussion of important elements of the book. By answering the questions, students will be able to respond to key details in the text by referencing the text (RL 3.1), identify how characters respond to major events and how their actions impact the plot (RL 3.3), describe how words and phrases supply rhythm and meaning (RL 2.4), and determine a central message (RL 3.2), among other skills.



HC: 978-1-5362-0608-1

Spanish edition, *¡Mambo mucho mambo!*
El baile que atravesó la barrera del color
 HC: 978-1-5362-1335-5

Both are also available as e-books.



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PRE-READING SUGGESTIONS

Before reading, it is helpful to support students in exploring some key concepts in order to ensure comprehension. This allows for them to capture the content and engage with the ideas and discussions more productively.

SEGREGATION

Help students understand what racial segregation is and how it functioned in 1940s New York City.

INTEGRATION

Support students to understand what the integration movement was and what it meant to have integrated schools, communities, and life in general.

RACISM

Children are aware of skin color differences and may demonstrate racial bias as early as pre-school (www.childrenscommunityschool.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/theyre-not-too-young-1.pdf). This book offers a good opportunity to engage in conversation about race and racism and help students develop anti-racist ideas.

CULTURE

The music in this book is directly connected to specific cultures. Help students understand what culture is and how it can be expressed through many elements, including music. This should help them to better understand the mambo.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the main idea of the story? What does the author want readers to understand?
2. Why can't the dancers join with dancers of other racial groups, and why is it such a big deal when Millie and Pedro dance together?
3. How do other people in the Palladium Ballroom respond to their coming together to dance?
4. What words would you use to describe people like Millie, Pedro, and all the others who joined with people not like themselves, even if it was against the rules?
5. What do you think brought all of these people together at a time when being separate was the rule?

SEGREGATION AND INJUSTICE

It is best to target this discussion and activity with time and space for the questions that will arise. If you don't feel comfortable having conversations about race or bias, then I invite you to do research and prepare yourself with the many powerful resources available so that you feel more confident and can engage in this necessary educational work. The issue of segregation is at the core of the book, and it's why Millie and Pedro coming together to dance is so significant. Help students understand what segregation means, how it was enforced based on race, and how it's part of American history. Incorporate historical context through nonfiction articles or short videos to explain the time period and the idea of segregation. When you've covered some of those basics, invite them into a discussion by using some of the following questions:

1. Why do you think separating people based on the color of their skin is wrong?
2. Is it ever OK to go against the rules? What can we call people who stand up for what is right, even if it means taking a risk by breaking a rule or a law?

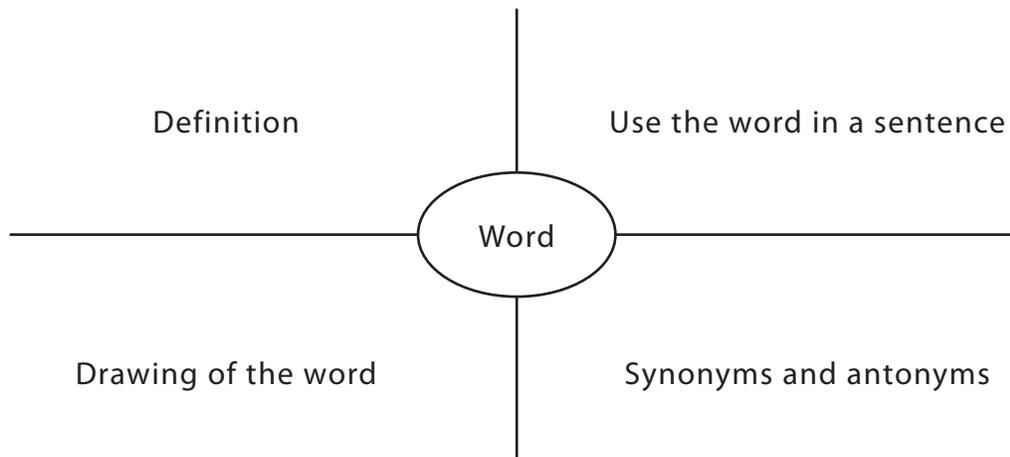
CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

A FOCUS ON LANGUAGE

By focusing on Dean Robbins's language, students can work on both building vocabulary and studying the author's craft.

VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

Through this activity, students will determine the meaning of words (RL 3.4) by selecting five to seven words they don't know, writing them on index cards, and working to determine their meaning. Have students organize their cards using this graphic organizer template. This offers students a chance to explore the word from various angles and uses various modalities (including drawing) to help with retention.



Combine all the cards to build a class word bank.

AUTHOR'S CRAFT

Through this activity, students will answer questions about unknown words and engage in group reading activities with purpose (RL K.4, K.10). Students will focus on all the words Robbins uses to describe the dancing, as well as words that describe sounds. Help them see that good writing includes words that are vivid and descriptive, even sensorial. Direct them to the book for examples. You can point out how the phrase "knees wiggled" offers a visual of how the knees looked and how "trumpets tooted" describes the sound of the music. Invite students into a study of Robbins's vivid word choice. Consider following these steps:

Step 1: Ask students to create a list of the phrases that describe dancing or sounds across various pages.

Step 2: Request that students underline, circle, or highlight the specific word in the phrase that helps them hear or see the detail vividly.

Step 3: Engage students in a discussion of the words they've selected by asking them to explain how their chosen words are descriptive.

A LATIN JAZZ CONCERT

Invite students to a classroom Latin jazz concert by researching videos featuring the artists mentioned in the book. Have a playlist ready to go on YouTube or another platform and play the music. Make observations about what instruments they hear, what other sounds they notice, and what feelings the music gives them. When the concert is over, research dance moves to Latin jazz (especially in the 1940s) and invite students to practice dancing to Latin jazz like Millie and Pedro did. This type of activity brings the book to life and also builds community among students.

LATIN JAZZ INSTRUMENTS

Through the illustrations in *¡Mambo Mucho Mambo!*, we see artists and musicians playing various instruments. Have each student select a Latin jazz instrument they'd like to learn more about and then do research to answer the questions on the Latin Jazz Instruments reproducible page.

EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

¡Mambo Mucho Mambo! is a picture book that welcomes interdisciplinary study. While the book is about one particular topic, there are many opportunities to integrate learning with other subjects. The blending of these subjects allows for students to understand big concepts and make connections across ideas. Here are some ways to engage in a study of this book through various other subjects.

MATH

There are opportunities to use math to study ideas presented in the book. For example, you can design lessons where students represent and interpret data regarding segregation using bar graphs (3.MD.B.3). You can compare the segregation of 1940s New York to the city's current levels or compare the segregation levels of your own community.

HISTORY

The author's note lists some important names in Latin jazz history. Provide research opportunities so students can learn about these individuals and the history of jazz while also learning about basic research practices, including finding information across a range of resources, paraphrasing, and proper citation.

CIVICS/SOCIAL STUDIES

In the author's note at the end of the book, Robbins talks about how Latin jazz was part of the inspiration for the civil rights movement. Use this book as a launching point into an exploration of the civil rights movement, who some of its leaders were, and what the movement achieved. Be sure to explore the various organizations that collaborated to bring about social change so the discussion is not limited to the story of only Martin Luther King Jr. and/or Rosa Parks.

GEOGRAPHY AND CULTURAL STUDIES

Latin jazz comes from a combination of several countries. Using a map, show students where the different countries are located and discuss what other types of music can be heard in these countries. Complement this map study by listening to the various types of music. If you are able to, invite local musicians to talk to your students.

Name: _____

LATIN JAZZ INSTRUMENTS

Instrument name: _____

Draw what the instrument looks like:

What does the instrument sound like?

What materials is this instrument made of?

What country does it come from?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

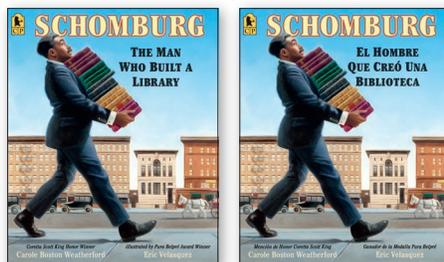
DEAN ROBBINS is a children's author, a journalist, and a lifelong student of jazz. He is the author of *Margaret and the Moon: How Margaret Hamilton Saved the First Lunar Landing*, *Miss Paul and the President: The Creative Campaign for Women's Right to Vote*, and *Two Friends: Susan B. Anthony and Frederick Douglass*. Dean Robbins lives in Madison, Wisconsin.



ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

ERIC VELASQUEZ is the award-winning illustrator of *Schomburg: The Man Who Built a Library* by Carole Boston Weatherford, which received a Walter Dean Myers Award and a Golden Kite Award. He has also won a John Steptoe New Talent Illustrator Award and a Pura Belpré Illustrator Award. Eric Velasquez lives in Hartsdale, New York.

Also illustrated by Eric Velasquez:



Schomburg: The Man Who Built a Library

HC: 978-0-7636-8046-6

PB: 978-1-5362-0897-9

Spanish edition, *Schomburg: El hombre que creó una biblioteca*

HC: 978-1-5362-1335-5

Both are also available as e-books.

Lorena Germán is a Dominican American educator supporting teachers with anti-bias and anti-racism education. She is the author of *The Anti Racist Teacher: Reading Instruction Workbook* and the forthcoming book *Textured Teaching: A Framework for Culturally Sustaining Practices* (Heinemann, 2021). She is cofounder of Multicultural Classroom as well as cofounder of #DisruptTexts and chair of NCTE's Committee Against Racism and Bias in the Teaching of English. Follow her on Twitter @nenagerman.