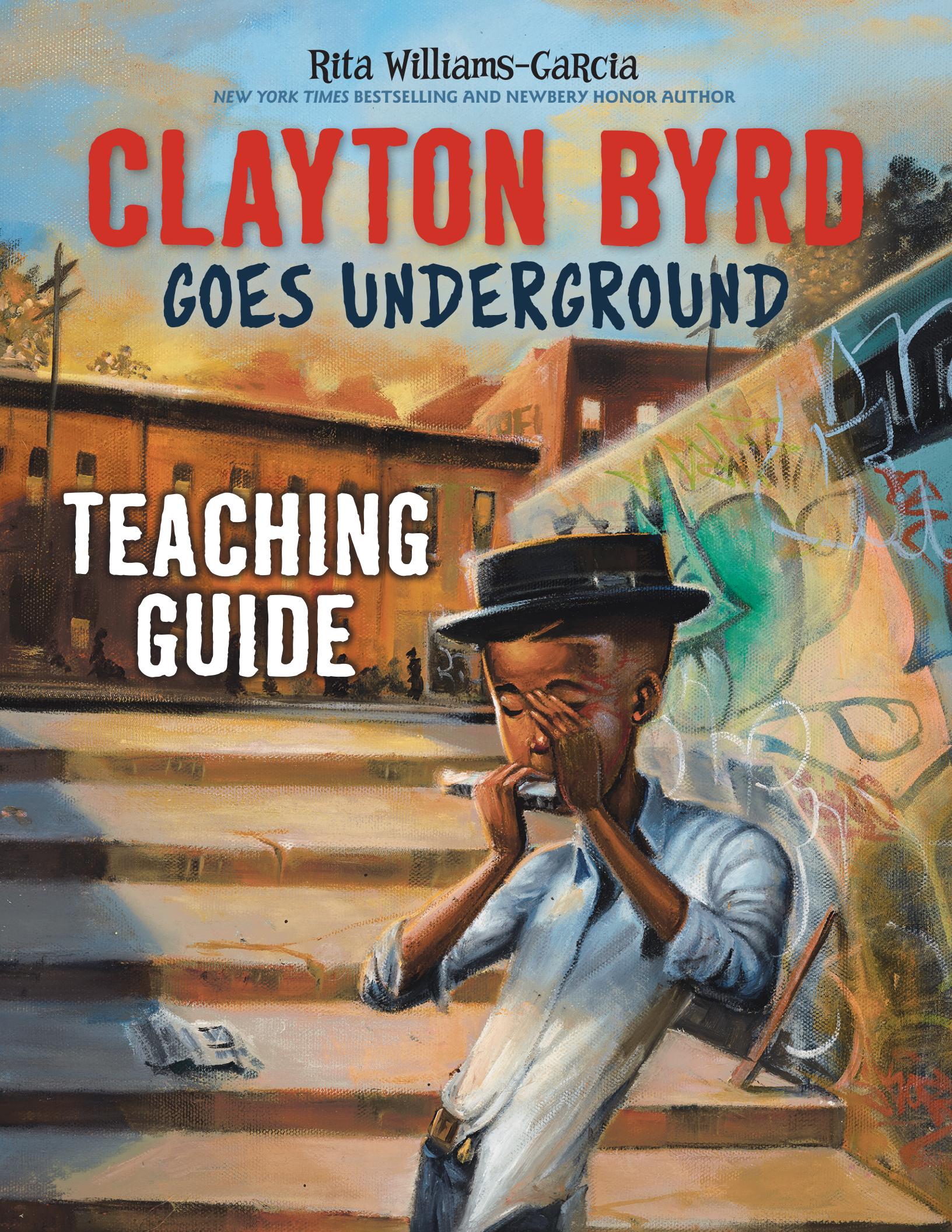


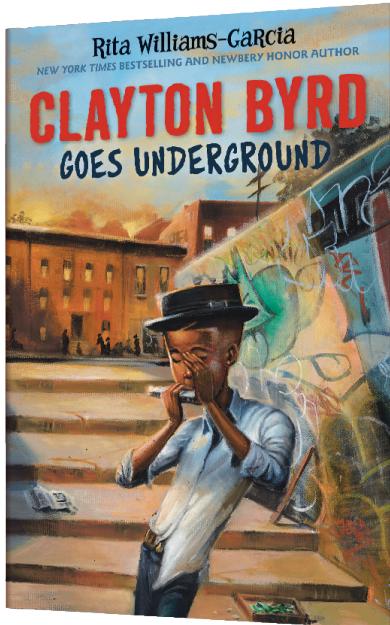
Rita Williams-Garcia

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AND NEWBERY HONOR AUTHOR

CLAYTON BYRD GOES UNDERGROUND

TEACHING GUIDE





GRADES
3-7

ABOUT THE BOOK

Clayton Byrd plays a mean harmonica, or as the blues players call it, a blues harp. And there's nothing he likes better than playing with Cool Papa Byrd, his grandfather, and Cool Papa's friends, the Bluesmen. No one understands Clayton the way his grandfather does. So when Cool Papa dies in his sleep one night, Clayton feels lost. It takes a strange journey on the New York City subway, where nearly everything goes wrong, for Clayton to appreciate what he still has. Cool Papa always said that "a bluesman ain't a bluesman without that deep-down cry." By journey's end, Clayton may just be a bluesman.



★ "This complex tale of family and forgiveness has heart. A first purchase."

—SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL (STARRED REVIEW)

★ "A holistic portrait of a family in pain, a realistic portrait of grief and reconciliation, and a reminder that sadness and loss are wrapped up in the blues."

—PUBLISHERS WEEKLY (STARRED REVIEW)

★ "Williams-Garcia skillfully finds melody in words."

—ALA BOOKLIST (STARRED REVIEW)

★ "Strong characterizations and vivid musical scenes add layers to this warm family story."

—KIRKUS REVIEWS (STARRED REVIEW)

★ "An appealing, realistic story with frequent elegant turns of phrase." —HORN BOOK (STARRED REVIEW)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rita Williams-Garcia's Newbery Honor-winning novel, *One Crazy Summer*, was a winner of the Coretta Scott King Author Award, a National Book Award Finalist, the recipient of the Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction, and a *New York Times* bestseller. The two sequels, *P.S. Be Eleven* and *Gone Crazy in Alabama*, were both Coretta Scott King Author Award winners and ALA Notable Children's Books. She is also the author of six distinguished novels for young adults: *Jumped*, a National Book Award finalist; *No Laughter Here, Every Time a Rainbow Dies* (a *Publishers Weekly* Best Children's Book), *Fast Talk on a Slow Track* (all ALA Best Books for Young Adults); *Blue Tights*; and *Like Sisters on the Homefront*, a Coretta Scott King Honor Book. Rita Williams-Garcia lives in Jamaica, New York, and has two adult daughters, Stephanie and Michelle, and a son-in-law, Adam. You can visit her online at www.ritawg.com.



Photo by Ferdinand Leyro

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. Describe Cool Papa, including his work, his personality, and his relationship to Clayton. Why does Clayton look up to him so much? How do you think Cool Papa feels about Clayton, judging from his actions? **RL.4-7.1, 4-7.3**

2. First Cool Papa reads *The Four Corners of the World* to Clayton, and then Clayton's class reads it. Describe as much of the book as you can. How is Pablo de Pablo's life like Clayton's? In what ways is Clayton's life an adventure? What does he explore? **RL.4-7.1, 4-7.2**

3. Why do Clayton and his mother clash so often? What does he do that makes her angry? What does she do that makes him angry? Describe her personality and her attitude, besides anger, toward Clayton. Analyze the scene where she picks him up from the police and what it shows about their relationship. **RL.4-7.1, 4-7.3**

4. Clayton's mother has a complicated relationship with Cool Papa. How does she feel about him? What in their past affects her feelings? Talk about why she holds the yard sale and how it affects Clayton. What's the significance of Clayton finding Cool Papa's guitar in his room on the last page? **RL.4-7.1, 4-7.3**

5. Describe Clayton's father, his interests, and his work. How does Clayton feel about his father when the book opens? How has that changed by the end? Talk about the relationship between Clayton's parents and how it affects Clayton. **RL.4-7.1, 4-7.3**

6. Clayton and his parents react to the loss of Cool Papa in different ways. Explain their reactions, pointing to specific actions and words. Who comes to Cool Papa's funeral, and what does that show about his life? **RL.4-7.1, 4-7.3**



7. Analyze the scene in which Clayton meets with Pastor Early. Why is Clayton there? How does he feel about it? What "clicks" with Clayton during their conversation, and why? Why do you think the pastor wants to see Clayton and his mother together the next time? **RL.4-7.1, 4-7.2**

8. Compare and contrast Clayton and his life to the Beat Boys and their lives. Why does Clayton get off the train to be with them? How do the different Beat Boys treat him? What attitude do the Beat Boys have about detention, and how does that compare to Clayton's? **RL.4-7.1, 4-7.3**

9. According to Cool Papa, "Happy people need the blues to cry, and sad people need the blues to laugh" (pp. 2-3). What do you think he means by that? Relate his words to his declaration that "a bluesman ain't a bluesman without that deep-down cry" (p. 6). By that definition, do you think Clayton becomes a bluesman during the story? Why or why not? **RL.4-7.1, 4-7.2**

10. Discuss the references in the story to angels. Why and when does Clayton's mother refer to him as an angel? What is a guardian angel, and who is called that? Why does Clayton smash the angel saltshaker? Relate the concept of angels to Clayton's concerns about what happens to someone, like his grandfather, after death. **RL.4-7.1, 4-7.2**



11. Discuss the book's title and why you think the author chose it. Why does Clayton get on the subway, and what challenges does he face because of it? Does anything good come out of his underground journey? What other meaning could there be to the idea that he goes "underground" besides his subway trip? **RL.4-7.2, 4-7.4**

12. Find language in the text that describes music, such as the music Cool Papa and the Bluesmen make. Identify which words are verbs and which are adjectives. What images do the words create? What does the imagery compare music to? For example, early in the narrative, it says Cool Papa could make his guitar "cry like no one else could" (p. 1). **RL.4-7.2, 4-7.4**

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Dear Beat Box. It seems like Clayton could be friends with Beat Box if they got to know each other better. Have pairs of students exchange letters as if one of them were Clayton and the other Beat Box. They should write at least three letters each, replying to the previous letter, referring to incidents in the book and also going beyond the book. The tone can be conversational rather than formal.

RL.4-7.1; W.4-7.3

Grandparents Rock. Like Cool Papa, many grandparents play an important role in the life of their grandchild. Have students write a profile of a grandparent. It can be their own grandparent or someone they know. They could also interview a friend or relative about their grandparent and write about them. Have students share their essays and identify common themes in them. **SL.4-7.1; W.4-7.2**

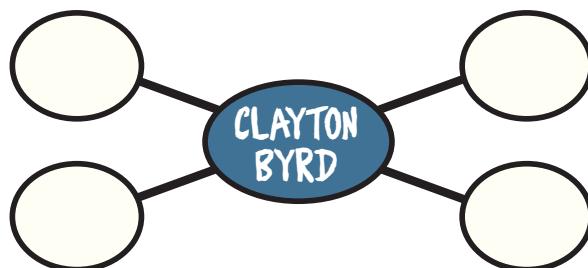
Meet the Author. To get a sense of the author's personality, share this video about Rita Williams-Garcia from We Need Diverse Books with your class. She talks to different school groups about her writing experiences and also speaks directly to the camera about the need for diverse books. Have students talk about the importance of reading books that reflect their lives and that introduce them to aspects of life they haven't experienced. What aspects of *Clayton Byrd Goes Underground* are familiar to them? What aspects are new? What aspects of the book might be unfamiliar to other readers? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RzKvRQVE1ZI>. **RL.4-7.1; SL.4-7.1**

Draw Those Tunes. Have students identify different songs, singers, and types of music in the book. Play a variety of that music and have students respond with artwork—

drawing, painting, or using some other medium to create art as they listen. When they finish, have them talk about how it felt to respond this way, and the relationship in general between music and visual arts. **SL.4-7.1**

A Murder of Crows. Clayton's teacher introduces some collective nouns for animals in conjunction with *The Four Corners of the World* (p. 40). Clayton applies two of those phrases, "murder of crows" and "wolf pack" to Train Ear and the other boys. List the phrases from the book on an easel and have students do research to find more to add to the list. As a class, discuss which ones they like best and why. Then have each student create five collective nouns, about animals or some other grouping, and compile a list of the class creations. **RL.4-7.4**

Clayton's Web. Have students complete character quality webs to explore four qualities that Clayton shows in the book. They should label each of the four outer circles with one of Clayton's qualities and then add an action or quotation from the book as evidence. **RL.4-7.1**



Counting Beats. Math and music are related through timing and counting. Throughout the story, Clayton uses musical beats to measure time, and the Beat Boys count beats to make dance steps and rhyme patterns. Have students create their own beats. Divide students into pairs, and while one person creates a rhythm by clapping a steady 1/2/3/4 four times, their partner claps a beat. For example, for each count of the rhythm, clap 1,1/2,2 / 3,3 / 4,4 four times. Change the rhythm to three counts 1/2/3 and the beats to clap on 1 and 3, while pausing on 2. Be creative. Mix double and single beats and use pauses. Practice finding rhythms and beats as a whole class by playing some of your favorite songs aloud and breaking down the sequence of rhythms and beats.

Blues Lyrics. Do you ever get the "Alarm Clock Blues"? How about "Lunch Line Blues"? Compose your own blues song by following the AAB "call-and-response" pattern seen in the chapters titled "When, Cool Papa, When?" and "Going Down." Blues lyrics often follow a three-line "call-and-response" pattern based on African American oral traditions. The two call, or "A" lines, are repeated (more or less), and set up a story or question. For example:

"Trouble, don't you find me; **Trouble leave me alone.**
I SAID, Trouble, keep your distance, **Trouble you
better leave me alone.**"

The call is then answered by the response, or the "B" line: "Every time I think I kicked you to the curb, Trouble,
I turn around and find you hanging on."



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