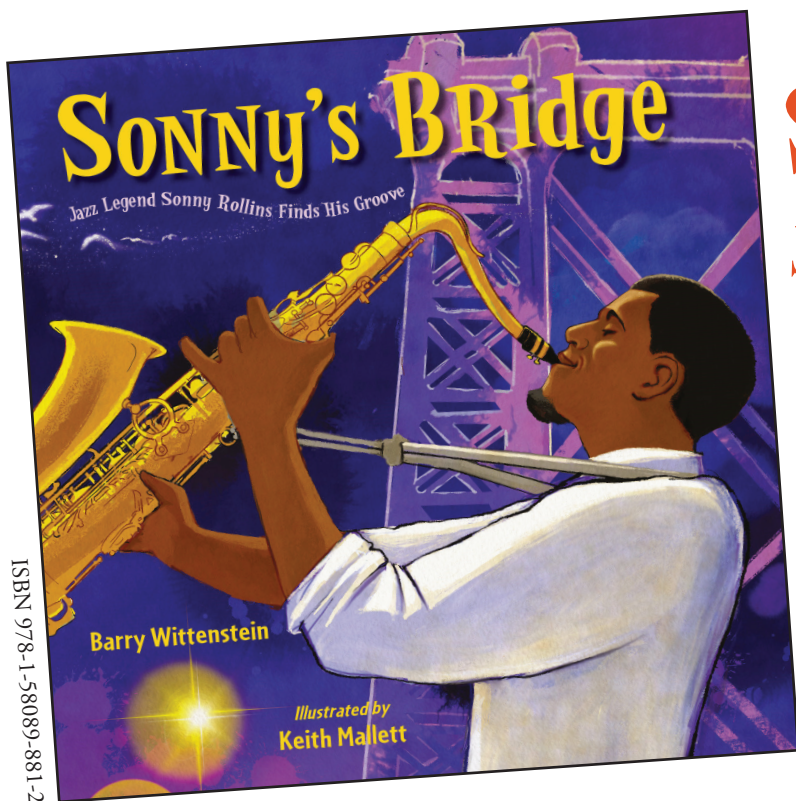


# Curriculum Guide



## SONNY'S BRIDGE

Jazz Legend Sonny Rollins  
Finds His Groove

BY  
Barry Wittenstein

ILLUSTRATED BY  
Keith Mallett



**S**onny Rollins is one of the most prolific sax players in the history of jazz, but in 1959, at the height of his career, he vanished from the scene. His return to music was an interesting journey—with a long detour on the Williamsburg Bridge. Too loud to practice in his apartment, Rollins played on the New York City landmark for two years among the cacophony of the traffic and the stares of bystanders. Then in 1962, Rollins went back to the studio and recorded arguably his best album to date: *The Bridge*. Told with a jazzy edge, *Sonny's Bridge* will inspire young readers.

Noted picture book biographer Barry Wittenstein chronicles saxophonist Sonny Rollins's search for perfection and peace of mind on the Williamsburg Bridge in this groovy, bebopping tribute to a musical legend.

★ “Written in free verse that flirts with rhyme, the text moves through measures and beats like the up-and-down swings of jazz.”—*KIRKUS REVIEWS*, STARRED REVIEW

“The life of jazz legend Sonny Rollins pulses with the rousing spontaneity of his music in Wittenstein's free verse biography.”—*SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL*

[onedogwoof.com](http://onedogwoof.com)

[charlesbridge.com](http://charlesbridge.com)

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The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) addressed by the discussion questions and activities in this guide are noted throughout. For more information on the Common Core, visit [corestandards.org](http://corestandards.org). To learn more about NGSS, visit [nextgenscience.org](http://nextgenscience.org).

# Discussion Questions

- \* Sonny Rollins was born in New York City during the Harlem Renaissance. What type of music was an important part of the Harlem Renaissance? Which artists were popular during this time period? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.2.1](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.1](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.1](#)
- \* How did musician Louis Jordan inspire Sonny's choice of musical instrument? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.2.1](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.1](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.1](#)
- \* The political climate and music in America changed after World War II. Look at the illustrations on the pages depicting a crowd in front of the Apollo Theater. What information about music can you gather from the illustrations? What information about the political climate is evident in the illustrations? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.7](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.7](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.7](#)
- \* Reread the page that begins with the text, "Turn the page to Rosa Parks, arrested 1950s." Notice how the author writes some words in all capital letters and other words are shown in italics and broken into syllables. Discuss why the author might have chosen this style and how it impacts your understanding of the story. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.2.5](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.5](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.5](#)
- \* At the peak of his success, Sonny walked away from performing music. Why did he make such an unexpected choice? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.2.1](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.1](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.1](#)
- \* What was Sonny's solution when he was faced with finding a place to practice playing his horn? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.2.1](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.1](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.1](#)
- \* Discuss the symbolism in Sonny's choice of a new rehearsal space and the name of his new album. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.4.5.A](#)
- \* Sonny headed back into the recording studio during the winter of 1962. How had his music and his attitude changed? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.2.1](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.1](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.1](#)
- \* Look at the time line of Sonny Rollins's life located at the back of the book. What awards did he receive from 2002–2011? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.2.1](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.1](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.1](#)
- \* Discuss the organization of the book and how it is divided into "first set," "intermission," and "second set." Why do you think that the author organized the book in this way? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.5](#)



The discussion questions and activities in this guide were created by Leigh Courtney, Ph.D. She teaches in the global education program at a public elementary school in San Diego, California. She holds both master's and doctoral degrees in education, with an emphasis on curriculum and instruction.

# Activities For Students

## Introducing Legends

During the Harlem Renaissance in the 1930s, music was king. Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Jordan, and Count Basie were all the rage. Choose one of these great musicians who influenced a young Sonny Rollins, and research his/her life. Write a short report about your selected artist's life and musical career.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.2.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.2

## Jazz 101

Gather recordings of songs by Sonny Rollins and the musical artists who influenced him, including Ella Fitzgerald and Duke Ellington. Listen to the recordings and as a class, work to identify the different musical instruments heard in each song. Discuss the mood of each piece—how does it make students feel as they listen to each recording?

## Honoring Sonny

The Williamsburg Bridge played an essential role in the life of Sonny Rollins. He spent many hours practicing his sax on the pedestrian walkway of the bridge. In 2017, The Sonny Rollins Bridge Project was founded with the goal of renaming the Williamsburg Bridge in his honor. Check out the website [sonnyrollinsbridge.net](http://sonnyrollinsbridge.net) for more information on this effort.

Use information from the book as well as the website to write a persuasive piece about why the Williamsburg Bridge should be renamed for Sonny Rollins.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.2.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.1

## Command Performance

Barry Wittenstein's story of Sonny Rollins is written in short phrases with italicized text, words broken into syllables, and lines in all capital letters. Work with a small group to perform a reading of a section of *Sonny's Bridge*. Pay close attention to the rhythm of the text and how your voices can match that rhythm. Will members of your group take turns reading lines or single words from the story? Will there be sections that are read chorally by the group? Make a plan of how to share the text and then perform it for other small groups. CCSS.ELA-

LITERACY.RF.2.4.B; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RF.3.4.B; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RF.4.4.B



# Figuring Out the Figurative Language

Figurative language uses figures of speech, such as metaphors, similes, and allusions, to go beyond the literal meanings of the words to give readers new insights and make the text more impactful. The language used in *Sonny's Bridge* is as lush and vibrant as jazz music itself. Find each of the following figurative phrases in the book, then write your own meaning for each.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.2.5; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.3.5; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.4.5



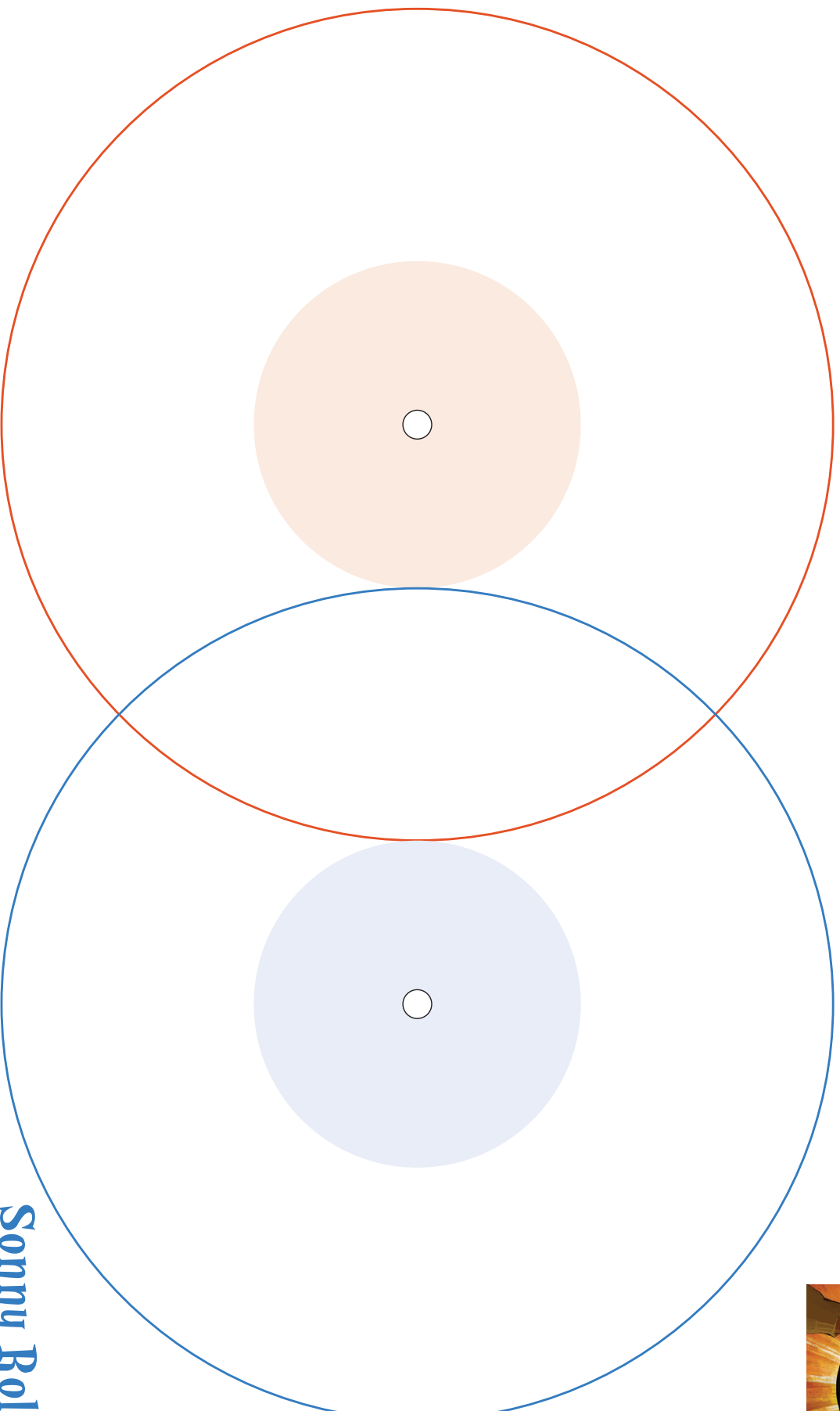
Figurative phrase from text	Meaning of figurative phrase
A harder, faster sound scratching at the front door.	
Painting rhythms with colors nobody ever seen before.	
Can't stop looking for that One. Lost. Chord.	
Hiding in plain sight.	
Finding inspiration, finding himself in the echoes of the echoes of the echoes.	
Dark shades on to keep the inside from getting out and the outside from getting in.	



# Comparing the Lives of Musicians

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Musicians often have more in common than their shared love of music. Using the information you gathered about the life of a famous musical artist from the Harlem Renaissance and the information from the time line of Sonny Rollins's life found at the end of *Sonny's Bridge*, complete a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the lives of two musical greats. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.2.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.1**



## Sonny Rollins

# Making Music: A STEM Project

Sonny Rollins loved his saxophone so much that he affectionately named her Henrietta. Try your hand at designing and creating a musical instrument out of recyclable materials. First, collect empty cereal boxes and cans, plastic bottles, paper rolls, bottle caps, and other found objects. Other supplies to have on hand: masking tape, stapler, glue, craft sticks, string, and rice or beans. Work in a small team to follow the design and engineering process to construct a musical instrument. **NGSS: K-2-ETS1-1; K-2-ETS1-2; 3-5-ETS1-1; 3-5-ETS1-2**

**ASK** What kind of musical instrument can we make? \_\_\_\_\_

## IMAGINE

Brainstorm ways to complete the task:

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**PLAN** Draw a diagram of the musical instrument.

List the materials needed:

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## CREATE

Follow the plan to make a model.

**IMPROVE** What works with your musical instrument? What doesn't work? How can it be better?

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**Share your finished musical instrument with other teams.**



# Word Search

People and locations important in Sonny Rollins's life are hidden within the letters below. Words can appear backward, frontward, and diagonally. Can you find them all?

G	L	O	U	I	S	J	O	R	D	A	N	D	B	D
C	R	E	N	O	H	P	O	X	A	S	V	L	L	U
T	O	U	B	I	G	A	P	P	L	E	Z	A	L	K
H	R	T	B	N	Y	L	K	O	O	R	B	R	A	E
E	Z	A	T	S	R	A	C	I	S	M	T	E	H	E
B	R	Z	T	O	M	W	P	U	W	H	L	G	E	L
R	E	K	A	T	N	A	Z	K	A	W	J	Z	I	L
I	V	L	G	J	E	C	I	R	P	J	D	T	G	I
D	I	Z	Z	Y	G	I	L	L	E	S	P	I	E	N
G	R	F	V	U	V	E	R	U	L	O	U	F	N	G
E	T	Z	G	P	M	D	C	N	B	I	U	A	R	T
U	S	P	O	B	E	B	N	E	E	B	W	L	A	O
M	A	N	H	A	T	T	A	N	T	H	O	L	C	N
M	E	L	L	I	H	R	A	G	U	S	B	E	A	X
C	L	R	E	K	R	A	P	E	I	L	R	A	H	C



Bebop  
BigApple  
Brooklyn  
CarnegieHall  
CharlieParker

CottonClub  
DizzyGillespie  
DukeEllington  
EastRiver  
EllaFitzgerald

Harlem  
Henrietta  
Jazz  
LouisJordan  
Manhattan

Racism  
Saxophone  
SugarHill  
TheBridge  
Williamsburg