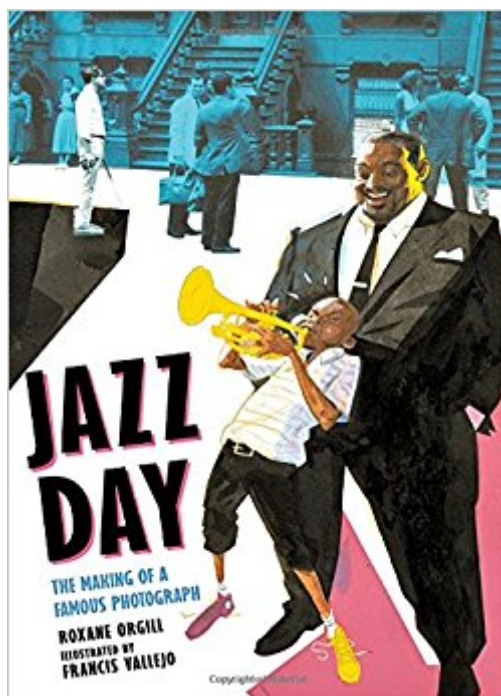


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# Jazz Day: The Making Of A Famous Photograph



## 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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Age Range: 8 - 12 years

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## Customer Reviews

Gr 4 Up "A collection of poetry that focuses on the day graphic designer Art Kane orchestrated the iconic 1958 photograph of American jazz greats on a stoop in Harlem. Though many may recognize the photograph, fewer will know the story of its creation. While working on a special issue of Esquire

magazine dedicated to jazz, Kane decided to see how many musicians he could gather in one place. The book starts on the morning the photograph was taken, with Kane standing in the street he's closed for the occasion, nervously hoping his call for appearances will be heeded. The verse spotlights the cast of characters that slowly materializes, with some short biographic poems and even one about Count Basie's hat. The offerings lead up to a foldout spread of the photograph itself, cued by a black page with the word *click* in white print. The remaining selections address the issue's immediate reception and laud Kane's accomplishment. The text is accompanied by vibrant, spectacular acrylic and pastel paintings by debut illustrator Vallejo. The volume includes an introduction, a lengthy author's note (with a useful key to the photograph), and short biographies of the major players. VERDICT A rich, unique, playful, and masterfully orchestrated work; Kane himself would undoubtedly be proud. —Jill Heritage Maza, Montclair Kimberley Academy, Montclair, NJ

When readers eventually open a foldout page to see the photograph, the moment is magic — alive with the presence and skill of the musicians, as well as the promise and potential of the children around them. Beyond being a glorious tribute to these jazz greats, the book is also a phenomenal debut for Vallejo, whose dynamic acrylic and pastel images bring readers into the heart of the action of a day like no other. —Publishers Weekly (starred review) Vallejo's acrylic-and-pastel paintings vividly capture the shoot's vignettes and the skittish excitement of neighborhood kids. Pulling details from a 1995 documentary film and other resources, Orgill and Vallejo offer a dynamic, multifaceted work that deftly juxtaposes biography with praise poem, information with imagination. Teachers, librarians, jazz-loving families: take note. —Kirkus Reviews (starred review) A rich, unique, playful, and masterfully orchestrated work; Kane himself would undoubtedly be proud. —School Library Journal (starred review) The poems vary in form and mood from an alphabetical acrostic of clothing to a pantoum in the voice of the young and awestruck drummer Eddie Locke. The rhythms are contagious. Saxophonist Lester Young's porkpie hat: "Roll the crown halfway down all around" / that's called "busting it down." / Turn it over and poke out the pit just a bit, / "bringing the lid back home." The words take you back to the photo — reproduced here as a gatefold spread, and placed in the perfect dramatic spot — and the excellent list of sources leads you back to the music. An inspiring example of art that arises from the simple question, "What did you notice in the picture?" —The Horn Book (starred review) Orgill, who has written about jazz for adults (and Ella Fitzgerald for children) is here paired with artist Vallejo, a welcome newcomer to the world of picture books, and they offer a memorable ode to a time and place, a celebration of music that was both hot

and cool, and an endearing snapshot of the men and women who wrote, played, and sang jazz. Kane's photograph, "Harlem, 1958," is here immortalized in Orgill's poetry, which swings and sways, and Vallejo's vibrant artwork, which captures not just the players but the mood on 126th Street where the photo shoot took place. Booklist (starred review) Kids indifferent to jazz or photography will be swept up nonetheless in the novelty of the episode, the idiosyncrasies of the participants, and the shoulder-rubbing between the neighborhood kids and the adult celebs. Vallejo's mixed-media illustrations are gems of freewheeling portraiture, drawing from the iconic photo itself and other film taken throughout the day. Orgill supplies biographical info on Art Kane and the musicians highlighted in her poems, and best of all, a double-page photo reproduction folds out at just the right moment from an asphalt black page with a single "click." Perfect. Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books (starred review) Together Orgill and Vallejo have created a rich cultural history that while detailing the process of making the photograph including the antics of those boys honors the jazz artists who light up the image. The addition of musicians' biographies, a valuable bibliography, and an elegant fold-out reproduction of the original photograph make "Jazz Day" both a celebration of an era and a valuable, vibrant resource, one that you should flip through with the volume turned up. The Boston Globe Little did they know that the photograph featuring 57 musicians and a group of neighborhood kids would become legendary. Roxane Orgill's dazzling Jazz Day: The Making of a Famous Photograph (Candlewick, Ages 7 – 11) tells how this celebrated image came to be... Francis Vallejo's striking acrylic-and-pastel illustrations offer similarly unexpected perspectives on streetscapes, nattily dressed musicians and interested onlookers. The Washington Post The gorgeous acrylic and pastel art illustrations perfectly capture the joyful chaos of the event. Buffalo News

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.

This is a wonderful telling of the story behind an iconic photograph of jazz musicians, taken in Harlem by Art Kane in 1958. The illustrations paint the rhythms of that day, and the prose/rhyme narration describes some of the participants and their place in the history of that photograph. It is an intriguing book for the curious child in all of us.

This book was just fantastic. It was well written and beautifully worded. But the illustrations blew me away! The pictures just made you feel the emotions of such a historic day. Highly recommend this one!

Outstanding artwork! Very cool book to have on the shelf.

The perfect picture book for ALL ages. Read the poetry and hear the jazz. Gifted author.

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 "The 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, "I 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.

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 day 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.

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