

DISCUSSION GUIDE

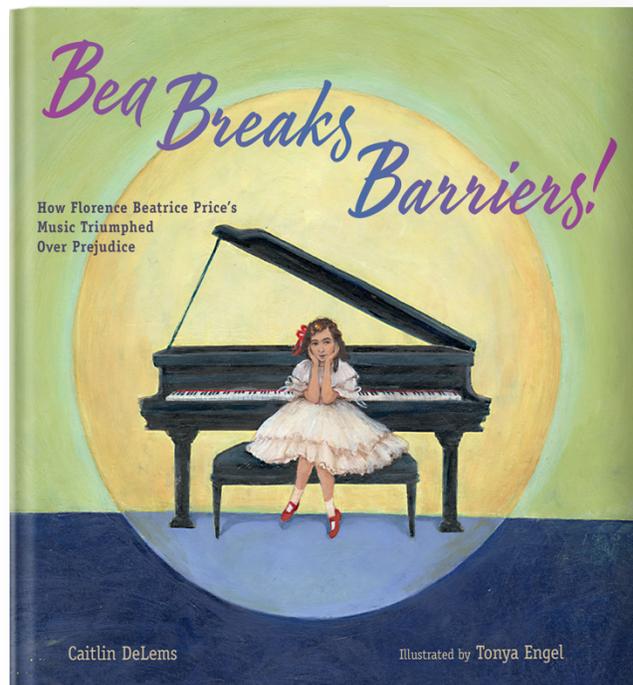
***BEA BREAKS BARRIERS!* How Florence Beatrice Price’s Music Triumphed Over Prejudice**

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Ages: 7-10
Grades 2-5

Guide written by Caitlin DeLems



ABOUT THE BOOK

Here is the little-known story of Florence Beatrice “Bea” Price, who faced many obstacles, including systemic racism, as she pushed forward to become one of the greatest Black classical composers.

Florence Beatrice Price was always breaking barriers—especially when it came to music. Raised in the Deep South, Bea broke through the barriers of racism and prejudice to master the piano and excel at school. And when opportunity came to study at the New England Conservatory of Music, Bea traveled north, one of only two Black students to attend.

Bea continued to break barriers when she returned to the South to teach and find inspiration for her music, drawing from many different genres. Bea fought hard to have her works played. One of her triumphs was being the first Black American woman composer whose symphony was performed by a major orchestra. But Bea’s music eventually became lost to time. When her musical scores were recently found in an abandoned house, Bea’s music was rediscovered—bursting forth for all to hear!

ASTRA BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS


CALKINS CREEK

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PRAISE FOR *BEA BREAKS BARRIERS!*

“A tribute to the perseverance of an underrecognized Black composer...Bea Price’s contributions to the musical world surely warrant a biography, and this one makes a strong case for her impressive body of music. Relying on a pastel palette and precise period details, Engel’s delicate illustrations bring both warmth and energy to the narrative. A much-needed account.” —*Kirkus Reviews*

“Readers enticed by this remembrance to seek out [Price’s] music won’t be disappointed.” —*Booklist*

“The book celebrates Price’s awe-inspiring determination and talent, offering a compelling look at a woman who broke barriers in classical music. This is an engaging introduction to an important, often overlooked figure in Black history and a great choice for children’s music education or Women’s or Black History Month.” —*School Library Journal*

“Through snappy sentences and sonorous diction, DeLems imbues this text with musicality, while Engel’s acrylic and oil paintings emphasize movement and light in a biography that zooms in on the figure’s career triumphs.” —*Publishers Weekly*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Examine the cover of **BEA BREAKS BARRIERS!** What do you predict this story is about? What clues does the title and subtitle provide for the story? Define and discuss the words barriers, triumphed, and prejudice.
2. The opening page of the book reads: “Florence Beatrice Price was not like other girls in Little Rock, Arkansas.” How was Bea different? Identify the sounds Bea heard. What did Bea do with those sounds?
3. There are many music-related words sprinkled throughout the book. “Juba” may or may not be a familiar word to you. Using the glossary in the back of this book, define and discuss “Juba” and other music-related words.
4. Bea faced barriers of prejudice and racism as she grew up. Why did Bea’s father host many overnight guests at their Little Rock home?

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5. When ragtime performer John William “Blind” Boone stayed with Bea, he “tickled the ivories with his ragged rhythms . . .” What does “tickled the ivories” mean? Define the word “ditty.” Can you whistle or sing a ditty? Can you create your own song or play a tune on a musical instrument?
6. Author DeLems writes: “In the South, signs shouted COLORED ONLY AND WHITES ONLY.” Look at the illustration of Bea’s expression as she reads the sign. How do you think Bea felt? Did these barriers prevent Bea from excelling in school? What award did Bea earn when she graduated high school?
7. The author quotes Bea as saying there was “no opportunity open” for her in the South, so she set her sights northward. How did racism and segregation impact Bea’s dream of a music career? What did Bea’s tenacity reveal about her character?
8. Bea traveled north to attend the prestigious New England Conservatory of Music. What did she discover upon arrival? Give evidence of Bea’s determination to pursue music at the Conservatory. Bea “spun” a music style all her own. Describe her music style. What degrees did she earn?
9. Bea was resolute and returned to the south after she graduated from the Conservatory of Music. Why? How did she help her community? When Bea married and raised a family how did she continue her dream of a musical career? How do Tonya Engel’s lively, detailed illustrations join the text to demonstrate this?
10. How did Bea’s move to Chicago help her music career? Author DeLems writes: “Bea and Marian connected like melody and harmony.” What does this statement mean? What did Bea celebrate when she wrote music?
11. As a single parent, what kind of jobs did Bea have to do to “scrape together earnings” and get by? How many children did she raise?
12. Bea desperately wanted her music to be heard. During Bea’s time, some people believed women were not intelligent enough to compose a symphony. Does this way of thinking differ from today? How? Bea played several instruments throughout her lifetime. Name them. What instrument do you play? What instrument would you like to learn?

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13. Bea became the first Black American woman to have her symphony played by a major American orchestra. Where did this take place? How was her Symphony in E Minor different from other symphonies?
14. In 1939, how did Bea’s arrangement of the spiritual “My Soul’s Been Anchored in de Lord” propel her into the national limelight? How big was the crowd size on that Easter Sunday? How many more people heard Bea’s song over the “radio waves?”
15. Before reading, you may have made predictions on what you thought Bea’s story was about. Were your predictions accurate? Does the story prompt you to investigate other women, or men, in music (or another career) during this historical period?

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS/EXTRA CREDIT

1. Bea was mesmerized with music from an early age. What kind of music did Bea crave inside her head as she grew? How does classical music differ from Patti’s Juba, folk songs, or African American or Black spirituals (known as Negro spirituals when Bea was growing up)? Consulting the backmatter of the book, select one or more types of music to report on and use different school library resources to help you.
2. Find out more about noted Black American singer Marian Anderson. At the end of the book, readers learn that Anderson was denied the right to perform at Constitutional Hall in Washington DC. Why? As a result of this denial, what famous woman actively supported Anderson to perform on Easter Sunday 1939 from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial? Was the Easter Sunday crowd integrated or segregated? Anderson’s performance went down in history as a dynamic protest – what was her protest against? Report your written findings about this historical event.
3. Throughout the story there are many examples of how Bea triumphs over prejudice. Give examples. How does Tonya Engel’s illustrations help you gain insight to the injustices in Bea’s world? Brainstorm ways to be kind when faced with an unjust situation. Write and illustrate a time you triumphed over an unfair act and share with the class.

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4. Bea demonstrates perseverance throughout her life to achieve her dream. During the late 1800's and into the 1900's, all women, but especially women of color, fought against social strictures and prejudice to pursue a career. Why do you think during this period in history it was harder for women than men to get an education and go after their dream career? What were the expectations of society about a woman's role during Bea's time?
5. Was Bea a trailblazer for other aspiring women musicians? What happened when she joined the NANM? How did she assist musical organizations? Write and share your findings.
6. Invite students to go to classicalkids.com and explore the site with their parents. Extra Credit: Ask the students to select an instrument on the site and compose their own song/music. Or instruct them to write a report on their favorite composer and the instrument of the orchestra they enjoyed the most.
7. As you learn in the book, Bea and her family fled north in the late 1920s during the Great Migration and the beginning of the Great Depression. What drove the large-scale movement of Black Americans to migrate from the South to the North, including Chicago, during the Great Migration period in America?
8. "Artists Who Made Up Bea's World" is found in the back matter. Read about the important people who supported and influenced Bea. Choose one or more musicians that you find intriguing and prepare a report for the class. Why did you choose this musician?
9. After reading the author's note, discuss why Bea wrote to Maestro Serge Koussevitzky of the Boston Symphony Orchestra multiple times. Did Bea succeed in her request? What do the actions Bea took show about her character? How many years later did the Boston Symphony perform three movements from her Symphony No. 3?
10. Review the timeline in the book. In what year and city was a building named after Bea? What building? When was Bea inducted into the Hall of Fame and the Arkansas State Music Teachers Association? What are the names of the orchestra and youth symphony most recently honored for their recordings of Price's works?