

TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR THE MAGIC IN CHANGING YOUR STARS

by Leah Henderson
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Summary (from the publisher):

Can you change your fate—and the fate of those you love—if you return to the past? Journey to 1939 Harlem in this time-travel adventure with an inspiring message about believing in yourself.

Eleven-year-old Ailey Benjamin Lane can *dance*—so he's certain that he'll land the role of the Scarecrow in his school's production of *The Wiz*. Unfortunately, a talented classmate and a serious attack of nerves derail his audition: he just stands there, frozen. Deflated and defeated, Ailey confides in his Grampa that he's ready to quit. But Grampa believes in Ailey, and, to encourage him, shares a childhood story. As a boy, Grampa dreamed of becoming a tap dancer; he was so good that the Hollywood star and unofficial Mayor of Harlem, Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, even gave him a special pair of tap shoes. Curious, Ailey finds the shoes, tries them on, taps his toes, and makes a wish. In the blink of an eye, he finds himself somewhere that is most definitely no place like home! Featuring an all-African-American cast of characters, and infused with references to black culture and history, this work of magical realism is sure to captivate and inspire readers.



Reviews:

- * Starred review SLJ
- * Starred review Kirkus
- * Starred review Booklist

About the Author:

Leah Henderson is the author of the middle grade novels *The Magic in Changing Your Stars* and *One Shadow on the Wall*, a Children's Africana Book Award notable and a Bank Street Best Book. Her work appears in the YA anthology *Black Enough: Stories of Being Young & Black in America* and her picture books include *Mamie on the Mound* and the forthcoming *Together We March* and *A Day for Rememberin'*. Leah holds a Master's in Writing and is on faculty in the Spalding University MFA program. Leah currently calls Washington, D.C. home.



Links to Leah Henderson Online

[Website](#)
[Twitter](#)
[Instagram](#)
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Standards: Common Core Alignment

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1,4.3, 4.9

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RF.4.4.A

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1, 5.3,.5.4, 5.6

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RF.5.4.A

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5

Reading Discussion Questions

Chapter 1-5

1. Why does Ailey want to audition for “The Wiz”?
2. What do we know about who Ailey is as a person? What words would you use to describe him? Here are some [sample character traits](#).
3. What do you think Ailey is going to do in the scarecrow audition to help himself stand out?
4. Describe Mahalia. What do you know about her from her words and her actions?
5. What do you think Grampa means when he says “Don’t let nobody see the sweat ‘round your collar”?
6. What are some other words of wisdom or advice Grampa gives Ailey? Do you know of any words of wisdom or sayings that a parent or grandparent says to you?

Writing Connection

Write about a time when you got nervous and couldn’t do something, like Ailey. You can even write it in a rap like Ailey does on page 35.

Movie Connections

Watch this movie trailer of [The Wiz](#).

Dance it Out

Try out these dance moves that Ailey does.

- How to do the [Dougie](#)
- How to [Moonwalk](#)

Chapter 6-10

1. What secrets do you think Grampa is keeping? What do you think he regrets?
2. What do the tap shoes represent to Grampa?
3. What do you think has happened to Ailey when he puts on the tap shoes at the end of Chapter 9?
4. What are some of the clues that Ailey notices that make him realize he has traveled back in time?

Explore Further

Apollo Theater--[Click here](#) for a Teacher's Guide that contains historic photos.

[The Drinking Gourd Constellation](#)

[Harlem 1939](#) Take a look at the photos in this collection. Choose one image to do a [thinking routine](#) around. One example might be [See-Think-Wonder](#).



● Chapters 11-15

- 1. Based on what is happening, how is Ailey feeling in this new time and place?
- 2. Why do you think Grampa acts like he doesn't know Ailey? What are the consequences of time travel?
- 3. Ailey tries to explain Hip Hop to Taps/Grampa. Think about something that is popular now that someone in the 1930s wouldn't know about. How would you explain it?



● Chapters 16-20

- 1. What do Ailey and Taps/Grampa have in common?
- 2. Why do you think they called Bojangles "The Mayor?"
- 3. Why do you think the hands on Ailey's Black Panther watch don't work?
- 4. What do you think Bumpy was going to do to Ailey?



● Chapters 21-25

- 1. What happened when Taps' family sees Ailey? What do you think it would be like to go back in time and see your family members when they were younger?
- 2. What consequences does Ailey think time travel has had?

Technology

Zelda needed to use the phone, but her neighbors were using it. Read and watch more about [Party Lines here](#).

• Chapters 26-30

- 1. Why does Sammy think Ailey is a thief?
- 2. How has Ailey and Taps' relationship changed?
- 3. How do you think Ailey will get home without the tap shoes?
- 4. Do you think the tap shoes have been good luck or bad luck so far? Why?
- 5. What is keeping Ailey going?
- 6. How does Taps react to Ailey's explanation in Chapter 29?

• Chapters 31-43

- 1. Do you think Taps can change his fate? Why or why not?
- 2. What do you think gave Taps the confidence he needed to perform?
- 3. When Ailey gets home, how have things changed?
- 4. How did Ailey change his stars?
- 5. What do you wish you could do to live with no regrets?

Book Connections

These books were mentioned in *The Magic in Changing Your Stars*.

[*The Watsons Go to Birmingham, 1963*](#) by Christopher Paul Curtis

[*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*](#) by L. Frank Baum

Writing

Using this book as a mentor text for:

Dialogue--Have students choose a page or two in the book that includes a lot of dialogue. Have students read the dialogue aloud and analyze it. What does the dialogue reveal about character? How does it reveal information about plot? How does it reveal voice? What other things make dialogue distinctive in this book?

Sensory Language--Take a look at Chapter 9. Reread it for sensory language. What senses does the author use to make the scene feel real? Have students look at a current story they are writing. Are there places they could include sensory language? Have them pick a sense to add to their drafts. For students who need a little extra challenge, have them pick a sense that isn't sight to add to their draft.

Figurative Language--This book is full of great examples of figurative language. For example: "Ailey moved like a fly to a flytrap--zzzip." (p. 44, Chapter 6). Have students pay attention to the similes throughout the book. Have them brainstorm similes they could use in their own writing.

Black Excellence Connections

The characters in the book are named after characters who were important in black history. Which one are you curious about? Click on the links to see more about each person. To see [all of the collections, click here](#).

[Alvin Ailey](#)

[Lena Horne](#)

[Diana Ross](#)

[Mahalia Jackson](#)

[Bill "Bojangles" Robinson](#)

For Further Reading

Alvin Ailey by Andrea Davis Pinkney, illustrated by Brian Pinkney (Little Brown, 1995)

Birth of the Cool: How Jazz Great Miles Davis Found his Sound by Kathy Cornell Berman, illustrated by Keith Henry Brown (Page Street Kids, 2019)

The Legendary Miss Lena Horne by Carole Boston Weatherford, illustrated by Elizabeth Zunon (Atheneum, 2017)

Mahalia Jackson: Walking with Kings and Queens by Nina Nolan, illustrated by John Holyfield (HarperCollins, 2015)

My Story, My Dance: Robert Battle's Journey to Alvin Ailey by Lesa Cline-Ransome, illustrated by James Ransome (Simon & Schuster, 2015)

Rap a Tap Tap: Here's Bojangles - Think of That! By Diane and Leo Dillon (Blue Sky Press, 2002)

The Roots of Rap: 16 Bars on the 4 Pillars of Hip-Hop by Carole Boston Weatherford, illustrated by Frank Morrison (Little Bee Books, 2019)

When the Beat Was Born: DJ Kool Herc and the Creation of Hip Hop by Laban Carrick Hill, illustrated by Theodore Taylor III (Roaring Brook, 2013)