



## ACTIVITY GUIDE

ACTIVITIES RECOMMENDED FOR CHILDREN AGES 8 - 9



# RENT PARTY JAZZ

WRITTEN BY WILLIAM MILLER

ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLOTTE RILEY-WEBB

Watch the video of actor  
**Viola Davis**  
reading this story at  
[storylineonline.net](http://storylineonline.net)



# ABOUT THIS STORY

## SYNOPSIS

This story is set in New Orleans in the 1930s. Sonny and his mother are scraping by to pay their rent. Mama works in a fish canning factory, and Sonny works for the coal man before school each morning. When Mama loses her job, they no longer have enough money for the rent and fear that the landlord will turn them out. One day Sonny meets Smilin' Jack, a jazz musician who is playing his trumpet in Jackson Square. Smilin' Jack offers to play at a party at Sonny's house to help raise money for the rent. The neighbors all come to sing and dance and before they leave, drop some coins in a bucket. Sonny learns how people can help one another "if they put their minds and hearts to it."

## THEMES IN THE STORY

Jazz music, Family & Community, Helping Others

## TALK IT UP!

Use the following questions to discuss the themes of the story:

- Sonny gets up early every morning to work for the coal man before school. He hears the "trumpet players blowing their horns." Listen to some Jazz music and try to identify a trumpet, a French horn and a trombone.
- Smilin' Jack tells Sonny about the rent parties back in Mississippi. Sonny thinks this is a "mighty fine idea" for paying the rent man. Do you think people in your community would have a rent party today? Why or Why not?
- Smilin' Jack decides to play at least one rent party wherever he goes to show "those rent men how good folks help each other." How can you use your talents to help people in your neighborhood?
- After the party, Smilin' Jack tells Sonny, "I sure hope to see you the next time I come to town. I know just where to find you now." Do you think Sonny sees Smilin' Jack again?

## RENT PARTY!

Sonny and Smilin' Jack plan a rent party to help Sonny's mama pay the bills. Sonny knocked on all the neighbors' doors to invite them to the party. Pretend that you are hosting a Rent Party today and create an invitation for your guests.

### MATERIALS —

Computer/laptop/tablet, basic software  
(Microsoft Word, Publisher or PowerPoint are simple tools for this project.)


### PREPARATION TIME —

None

### LENGTH OF ACTIVITY —

30 minutes

### DIRECTIONS FOR ACTIVITY: CREATE A PARTY INVITATION! —

 **Google It:** Search for “sample party invitations” to brainstorm ideas for your event!

Be sure to include important party details:

- Who is invited?
- What is happening at the party?
- When is the party? Include day, date and time.
- Where does the party take place?
- Why should guests attend the party?
- How do the guests RSVP for the party?

See sample invitation: Does it have all the information guests need?



## WRITING ACTIVITY: WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD

The jazz musician Louis Armstrong was born on August 4, 1901, in New Orleans, Louisiana. Similar to Sonny, Louis was raised by his mother and they struggled to pay the bills. According to the “Afterword” in the book, Louis Armstrong is one of the many jazz musicians that developed his music style and talents at rent parties.

### MATERIALS —

Internet, Digital Device, Song “What a Wonderful World” by Louis Armstrong, Paper, pen or pencil

### PREPARATION TIME —

5 minutes

### LENGTH OF ACTIVITY —

40 minutes

### DIRECTIONS FOR ACTIVITY —

**Step 1:** Discuss the song title, “What a Wonderful World”. What do you think it means?

**Step 2:** Play the song and listen to the words. What words and phrases did you hear? Do these words and phrases give you an image of a wonderful world?

**Step 3:** Create a short skit or play to act out the lyrics of the song.

“What a Wonderful World” song lyrics

I see trees of green, red roses too  
I see them bloom for me and you  
And I think to myself what a wonderful world  
I see skies of blue and clouds of white  
The bright blessed day, the dark sacred night  
And I think to myself what a wonderful world  
The colors of the rainbow so pretty in the sky  
Are also on the faces of people going by  
I see friends shaking hands saying how do you do  
They're really saying I love you  
I hear babies crying, I watch them grow  
They'll learn much more than I'll never know  
And I think to myself what a wonderful world  
Yes I think to myself what a wonderful world

## COOKING ACTIVITY: PO-BOY SANDWICH

The Po-Boy sandwich was invented in New Orleans in the 1920s to feed the “poor boys” who could not afford a large meal. See what it's like to eat like a “po-boy”!

### INGREDIENTS — 4 SANDWICHES

#### Shrimp

(1) 18 oz box Popcorn Shrimp  
Favorite Creole seasoning  
Optional: Lime wedges

### Remoulade sauce

- 1/3 cup mayonnaise
- 2 tablespoon horseradish sauce
- 1 tsp minced garlic
- 1 tsp sweet relish
- ½ teaspoon cayenne pepper (more if you like it spicy)
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon fresh squeezed lime juice

### Assembly

- 4 French rolls, split and hinged
- 4 tablespoon melted butter
- 1 tsp minced garlic
- 1 1/3 cups shredded lettuce

## **INSTRUCTIONS**

### Shrimp

1. Cook shrimp according to package instructions. When shrimp are done cooking, remove from oven and sprinkle with Creole seasoning.
2. Prepare the remoulade sauce while shrimp are cooking.

### Remoulade Sauce

1. Combine mayonnaise, horseradish sauce, garlic, relish, cayenne pepper, soy sauce, and lime juice in a small bowl. Set aside.
2. Combine butter and garlic.
3. Spread on rolls. Once shrimp are done cooking, turn off the oven and bake rolls in the oven for 3-5 minutes.

### Assembly


1. Place 1/3 cup lettuce on each roll, followed by shrimp, and a drizzle of remoulade sauce. Sprinkle on additional Creole seasoning, if desired, and serve with lime wedges.

Add some math to your recipe!

- How many shrimp are in your 18oz box? Count them to find out!
- If you are making 4 sandwiches, how many pieces of shrimp go on each sandwich to be even?
- If only 3 people eat a sandwich, how many total shrimp are eaten?

## **EXPERIMENT: MAKE YOUR OWN HARMONICA!**

The harmonica, also known as a French harp or mouth organ, is a free reed wind instrument used worldwide in many musical genres. The first jazz recordings of harmonicas were made in the United States in the mid-1920s.

 **Google It:** Search “mouth organ” to learn more about the harmonica.

### **MATERIALS —**

2 Popsicle sticks (wide ones recommended), 1 big rubber band, 2 smaller rubber bands (or string), Strip of paper the size of the Popsicle stick, 2 toothpicks cut the width or just wider than the Popsicle Stick

### **LENGTH OF ACTIVITY —**

15 minutes

**PROCEDURE FOR EXPERIMENT —**

**Step 1:** Sandwich the paper strip in between 2 Popsicle sticks.

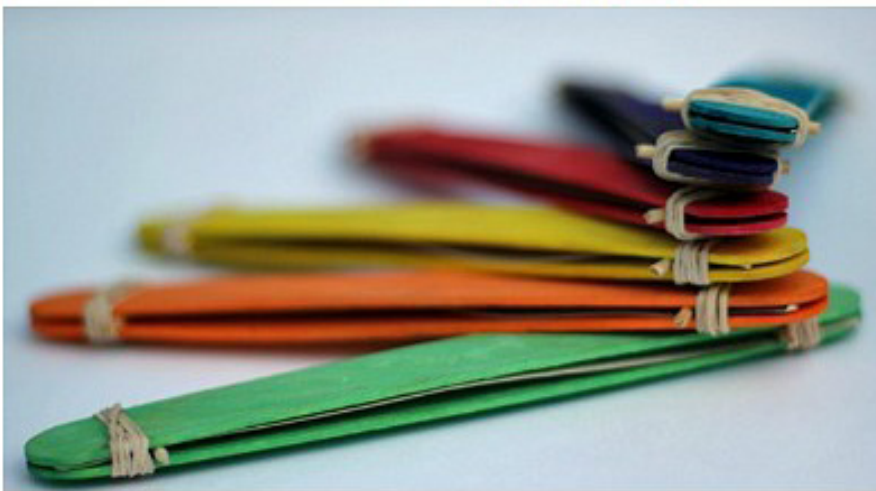
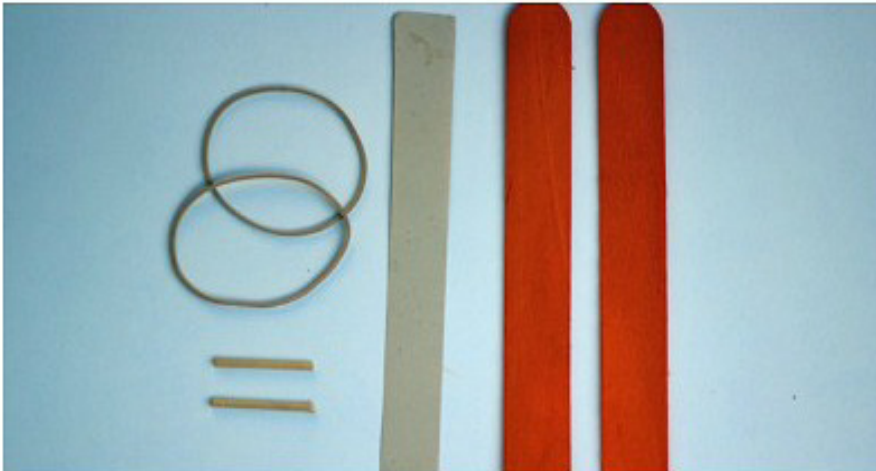
**Step 2:** Wrap a rubber band around one end until it is snug.

**Step 3:** Slide a toothpick to the inside of the rubber band.

**Step 4:** Sandwich the last toothpick at the other end of the Popsicle sticks and secure with rubber band.

**Step 5:** Blow through the middle and make some noise.


What do you think is making the sound? How can you make the sound higher or lower?



# PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

## LEARN THE PEABODY

Sonny's house and street were filled with people when Smilin' Jack started playing. The crowd was clapping, singing and dancing. The Peabody was danced to a lot of tunes played by the jazz musicians of the early 1920's. The Peabody is a brisk dance that covers a lot of space on the dance floor.

 **Google It:** Search "How to Dance the Peabody: The Basics" to find a video lesson that is suitable for you and your partner.

## "NEW ORLEANS"

Rent Party Jazz take place in New Orleans, Louisiana. The city is known for its cuisine, music and Mardi Gras! Have fun playing this charade game by using activities, animals or concepts related to the birthplace of Jazz. This fun playground game combines creativity and exercise. No equipment is required, although some fixed objects make useful bases. Recommended for a minimum of 4 people.

### DIRECTIONS FOR ACTIVITY —

**Step 1:** Choose sides

**Step 2:** Each team establishes a home base of reasonable running distance apart. One side leaves home base to approach the other, stopping at a designated line in front of the opposing side. The approaching team (Team A) initiates a dialogue with the opposing team (Team O):

**Team A:** "Here we come!"

**Team O:** "Where you from?"

**Team A:** "New Orleans."

**Team O:** "What's your trade?"

**Team A:** "Lemonade."

**Team O:** "Show us some, if you're not afraid!"

**Team A:** The approaching team agrees on an activity, animal, or concept to act out prior to approaching the opposing team. For example, if the approaching team agreed to act out "musicians", then the players would make musician-like motions, in response to "Show us some, if you are not afraid!"


**Team O:** The opposing team tries to guess the charade. Once someone on the opposing team guesses correctly (i.e. calls out "musicians") the opposing team chases approaching team back to their own home base. Anyone caught joins the chasing. The game continues until everyone is taken onto one side.

# FIELD TRIPS

Field trips are a great way to make a real world connection to the story.


## NEW ORLEANS OPERA

The New Orleans Opera’s community outreach project includes live performances in local schools and student matinees of main-stage operatic productions. Also, student groups may attend final dress rehearsals of all New Orleans Opera productions for free.

 **Google It:** Search your local community to see if it has a community outreach project similar to the New Orleans Opera. If so, go see a show!

## FISH CANNING FACTORIES

Sonny’s mom worked in a fish canning factory. She packed fancy little fish all day long.

 **Google It:** Search “fish canning factories” to learn more about this industry. Is there a local cannery in your community? Schedule a visit to see what Sonny’s mama did with her days.

## DO SOMETHING

There has been a rent party revival for some folks who have hit hard times in recent years. Host a “Rent Party” at your home and donate proceeds to your local emergency rent assistance agency. Have your talented friends - musicians, singers, dancers, spoken-word artists, comedians and magicians – entertain. Guests are encouraged to donate \$5 for the evening’s entertainment, food and beverages.



# ABOUT US

## ABOUT STORYLINE ONLINE

The SAG-AFTRA Foundation's children's literacy website *Storyline Online*® streams imaginatively produced videos featuring celebrated actors to help inspire a love of reading. Storyline Online receives millions of views every month in hundreds of countries. Visit Storyline Online® at [storylineonline.net](http://storylineonline.net).

## ABOUT THE SAG-AFTRA FOUNDATION

The SAG-AFTRA Foundation provides vital assistance and educational programming to the professionals of SAG-AFTRA while serving the public at large through its signature children's literacy programs. Founded in 1985, the Foundation is a national non-profit organization, independent from SAG-AFTRA, and relies solely on support from grants, corporate sponsorships, and individual contributions to maintain our programs and create new ones. Visit [sagaftra.foundation](http://sagaftra.foundation).

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