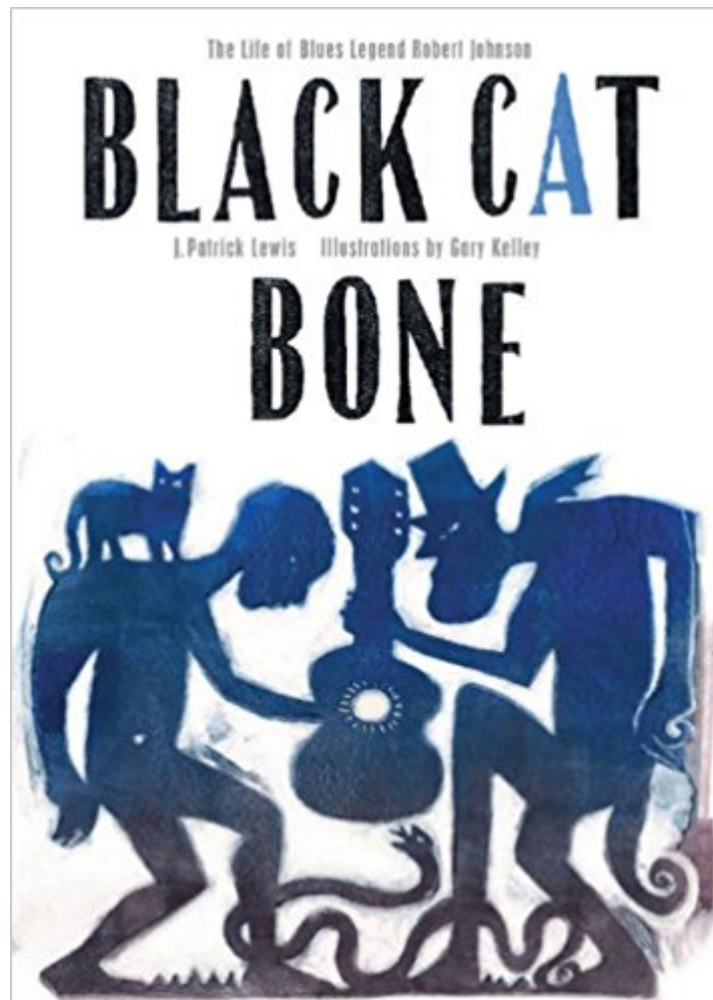


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# Black Cat Bone



## Synopsis

Legend credits his success to a midnight pact at a crossroads, but what is the real story of bluesman Robert Johnson?

## Book Information

Hardcover: 48 pages

Publisher: Creative Editions; Stated First Edition / First Printing edition (September 1, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1568461941

ISBN-13: 978-1568461946

Product Dimensions: 9 x 0.4 x 12.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 3 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #764,465 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #55 in Books > Children's Books > Arts, Music & Photography > Music > History #186 in Books > Children's Books > Biographies > Musical #978 in Books > Children's Books > Biographies > Multicultural

Age Range: 11 - 15 years

Grade Level: 4 - 7

## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Grade 6 Up “Robert Johnson, the celebrated blues musician, is said to have sold his soul to the devil for his skills on the guitar. In fact, there is so much legend and conjecture surrounding this man (who literally died from drink and women) that he makes the perfect subject for a poetic biographical treatment. Lewis’s verse echoes Johnson’s music, as in this promise from the devil at the crossroad: I’m a cutthroat seller,/The Magician of Deal/Who can stoke sweet fire/That’ll make you feel/Like a hothouse flower/On double defrost/Who won’t give a nickel/For the petals it lost. A single line of text parades ghostlike across the bottom of each page, explaining the aspect of the man’s life that the poem sings of, and becoming a cumulative mini-bio in itself. A couple of Johnson’s own lyrics appear with the sequence of Lewis’s poems where they add to the narrative tension. Kelley’s mixed-media illustrations in blues and browns add to the mood and enliven the layout. With further biographical and bibliographic notes at the end, the resulting package is surprisingly deep: what appears at first glance to be just an illustrated poetry collection is a well-supported narrative riff introducing Johnson “the man and his music. Though a picture book, this title requires at least a middle-school-age audience, and will be best appreciated by older young

adults, finding resonance with musicians, poets, or other artists who are feeling the blues.â “Nina Lindsay, Oakland Public Library, CA Copyright Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

**\*Starred Review\*** The story of blues guitarist Robert Johnson--both the legend and the facts--hardly seems the stuff of a picture book. Johnson died young--in 1938, at 27, most likely poisoned in a dispute over a woman, or, as legend has it, the victim of a deal with the devil, who claimed Johnson's soul in exchange for mastery of the guitar. His influence on generations of blues, jazz, and rock musicians is unquestioned, however, and Lewis tells the story in evocative poems that use Johnson's lyrics to evoke the spirit of the blues and the hard times Johnson endured growing up in the Mississippi Delta. Like Wynton Marsalis' poems in *Jazz A B C* (2005), Lewis' imagery is probably too subtle for even middle-graders to grasp without help, but older readers with an interest in Johnson and the blues will feel the rhythm and understand the message of living for the moment and the music. Kelley's striking paintings, heavy with multiple shades of blue and brown, capture all the emotions that swirl around the Johnson myth: loneliness, obsession, and melancholy, of course, but also the up-tempo electricity generated by a bluesman in full cry. Bill OttCopyright Â© American Library Association. All rights reserved

Wonderfully written book with outstanding illustrations!

A poetical biography of Robert Johnson, blues musician. The story is told through a series of poems, so check with your child's teacher before you choose it for a report. The illustrations are fascinating, and it's fun to play his music, or other blues music, while you read and talk about this with your kids. There is a good summary/timeline at the back of the book. Two cautions: 1) The book mentions the legend that Robert Johnson "sold his soul to the devil" to become a musician. In our family, we don't play around with stuff like that, so I had to address that up front. 2) Poisoned to death at age 27, legend has it by a jealous husband. This book does mention hundreds of love affairs and jealous husbands. Moms and dads need to know what their young ones are reading. The grown-up subject matter makes this book better for junior high students and older, and the illustrations are so interesting that this will not come across as "just a kids' book." Very well done.

When I first received *Black Cat Bone: The Life of Blues Legend Robert Johnson*, I wondered why someone would write a picture book about a man who reportedly sold his soul to the devil in

exchange for his now-legendary guitar licks, who also drank heavily, stole men's wives, and ultimately died after being poisoned by a jealous husband. Upon further inspection, I discovered that the book is geared toward an audience of grade six and up and that J. Patrick Lewis did a fine job of ever-so-slightly glossing over the rather grittier parts of Robert Johnson's life, creating a poetic tribute to the stories he left behind. I did not hear Robert Johnson until I was eighteen, although I'm sure many of my more musically inclined friends--the ones who sought out old vinyl while I was still copying Paula Abdul's dance moves--learned about him long before that. But imagine being introduced to Johnson as early as age twelve. It's the kind of moment that can change the course of your future, especially if you happen to already have access to an acoustic guitar. Lewis tells the story of Johnson's life through verse, with further biographical information in the forward and endnotes. His poems, including multiple rhyme schemes and free verse appropriate to their subjects, will leave readers smiling with their bluesy rhythms and soulful lines. Likewise, Gary Kelley's illustrations are stunning. Although they could easily stand on their own, they are the perfect complement to Lewis's writing and Johnson's history. Still, I wonder what pre-teen would feel comfortable whipping out a picture book in homeroom--perhaps one who can fully appreciate the legend that was Robert Johnson and knows that it doesn't matter a lick what people think. All that matters is that you have stood at the crossroad and found which way is yours. Armchair Interviews says: Wonderful words about the man and his music.

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