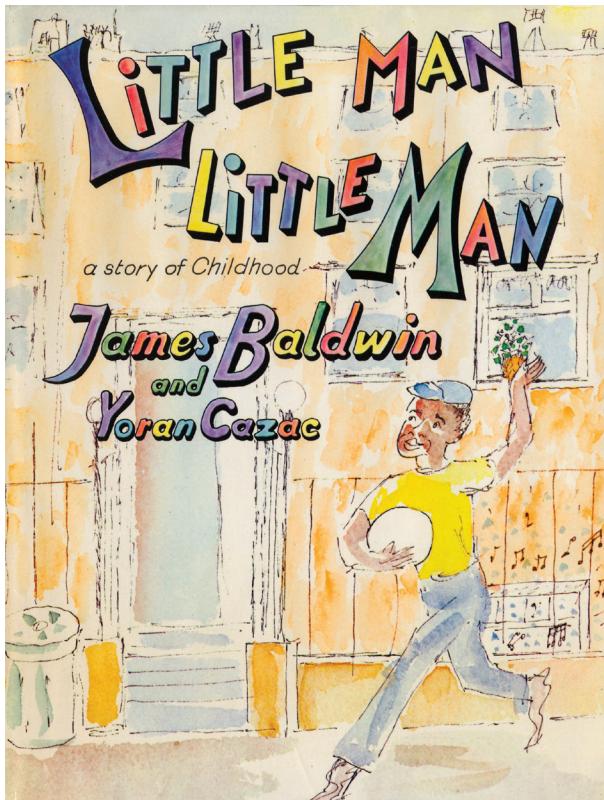


# Teacher Resource Guide for Little Man, Little Man by James Baldwin



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## Little Man, Little Man

A Story of Childhood

by JAMES BALDWIN

With illustrations by YORAN CAZAC

**Four-year-old TJ spends his days** on his lively Harlem block playing with his best friends WT and Blinky and running errands for neighbors. As he comes of age as a “Little Man” with big dreams, TJ faces a world of grown-up adventures and realities. Baldwin’s only children’s book, *Little Man, Little Man* celebrates and explores the challenges and joys of black childhood.

**Now available for the first time in forty years**, this new edition of *Little Man, Little Man*—which retains the charming original illustrations by French artist Yoran Cazac—includes a foreword by Baldwin’s nephew Tejan “TJ” Karefa-Smart and an afterword by his niece Aisha Karefa-Smart, with an introduction by two Baldwin scholars. In it we not only see life in 1970s Harlem from a black child’s perspective; we gain a fuller appreciation of the genius of one of America’s greatest writers.

★ “Back in print after decades, Baldwin’s warmly vernacular tale celebrates and explores the challenges and joys of childhood on a 1970s-era Harlem block rippling with black life. . . . Pulled from the past, this is a brilliant exploration of black childhood with profound emotional depth, drawn from the grace and struggles of community and reinforcing the truth that no one knows Harlem like Baldwin.”—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

★ “Seen through TJ’s eyes and written in the black English Baldwin celebrated, the story views the life of his family and their neighborhood in a swirl of impressions, memories, and anxieties. . . . Through luminous prose and fine observation, readers come to care deeply about TJ and his friends, and they’ll wish their story didn’t end so soon.”—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

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[dukeupress.edu](http://dukeupress.edu)

The Common Core State Standards addressed by the discussion questions and activities in this guide are noted throughout.

For more information on the Common Core, visit [corestandards.org](http://corestandards.org).

# Discussion Questions

Describe the setting of the story. How do the author's words and the illustrator's paintings inform readers about where and when this story takes place?

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1

Why do you think the author chose to tell the story through the point of view of TJ? Support your opinion by citing information from the foreword and from the text of the story.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.6; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.6; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.6

When *Little Man, Little Man* was first published in 1976, the book was subtitled "A Story of Childhood." That original book jacket also described the book as a "child's story for adults." Discuss how *Little Man, Little Man* functions as both a story for children and for adults. What messages might the story convey to both the young and to the adult reader?

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.2

Author James Baldwin made a pointed decision to write the story in a black vernacular voice. What effect does the language of the book have on your reading, specifically on your understanding of the characters in the story?

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.4; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.4

Who is Mr. Man? How does Mr. Man interact with the kids on the street and in the building? What other side of Mr. Man's personality and life is revealed when WT's foot is injured by the broken bottle?

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3

What is WT's connection to TJ? How does WT demonstrate his bond with TJ?

Who is Miss Lee and how does she interact with the kids playing in the street? What information is revealed about Miss Lee toward the end of the story?

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3

James Baldwin describes in great detail TJ's elderly neighbor, Mrs. Beanpole, on pages 40–47. Re-read the character description of Mrs. Beanpole and discuss what the details of her apartment and her clothing reveal about her life. What do you imagine her life was like in the past? What do you think her feelings are about life in the present time?

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3

Where does TJ's dad take his son on special days? What message do you think TJ's dad was giving his son by taking him on the outings and saying, "I want you to be proud of your people"?

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.2

Who is Blinky? How does TJ describe his friend? How does Blinky show maturity when the three kids are in Mr. Man's apartment to tend to WT's injured foot?

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3

Mr. Man tells Miss Lee, "One of these days I'm going to have to put you away again." WT gets into a fight with his older brother who hangs out listlessly on the stoop. Both of these scenes suggest issues that stem from substance abuse. How do the actions of Miss Lee and WT's brother affect others in the story? Why do you think that it was important for the author to include characters struggling with drugs and alcohol in this "story of childhood"?

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3

After the tense scene in Mr. Man's basement apartment, how does the author switch the mood at the end of the story?

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.2

# Activities for Students

TJ notes the color of everyone's skin throughout the story. He describes Mr. Man as "about the color of chocolate cake without no icing on it." Using multicultural color paints, mix the paints together until you achieve a close match to your skin color. Use your customized paint to create a self-portrait. Write a piece to accompany your self-portrait describing when you first remember noticing the color of your skin. Where were you? What was the situation where skin color was discussed?

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3

TJ and WT are connected through friendship and proximity. They are neighbors and in some sense they are also brothers. Compare the two characters using a Venn diagram. Note their similarities and differences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3

Blinky is very responsible during the episode of the bottle dropping from the roof, WT's cut foot, and the kids' trip to Mr. Man's apartment for first aid. Imagine what Blinky was thinking and feeling throughout this scene. Rewrite this section of the story from Blinky's point of view. Include her thoughts and emotions about WT's injury and the situation between Mr. Man and Miss Lee.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3

TJ is very connected to the rhythm of life on his street. The people, the buildings, and the shops all define how TJ experiences the world. Write a "Where I'm From" poem from TJ's perspective. Include details from the story and the people and places that shape TJ.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3



James Baldwin and his nephew TJ "Little Man" Karefa-Smart,  
Summer 1978

**JAMES BALDWIN** (1924–1987), the world famous novelist, playwright, essayist, critic, and public intellectual, was the grandson of a slave. He grew up in Harlem and was the oldest of nine children. *Little Man, Little Man* was written for his niece and nephew who appear as characters in the book.

**YORAN CAZAC** (1938–2005) was a French artist who first met James Baldwin in Paris in 1959. They rekindled their friendship in the 1970s, when Baldwin asked Cazac to provide the illustrations for *Little Man, Little Man*.

*The discussion questions and activities in this guide were written by LEIGH COURTNEY, PhD. She teaches in the global studies program at a public elementary school in San Diego, California. She holds both master's and doctoral degrees in education with an emphasis on curriculum and instruction.*