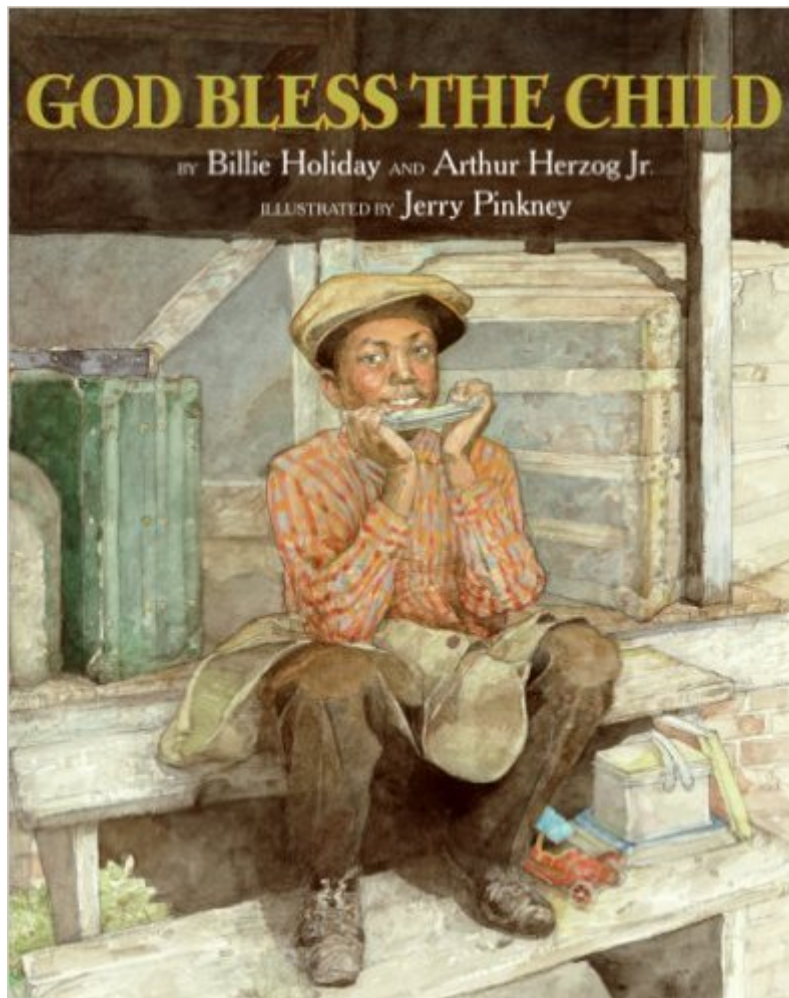


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# God Bless The Child



## Synopsis

The song "God Bless the Child" was first performed by legendary jazz vocalist Billie Holiday in 1939 and remains one of her enduring masterpieces. In this picture book interpretation, renowned illustrator Jerry Pinkney has created images of a family moving from the rural South to the urban North during the Great Migration. This extraordinary book stands as a tribute to all those men and women who dared so much to get their own.

## Book Information

Age Range: 3 and up

Paperback: 40 pages

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Language: English

ISBN-10: 0064436462

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Product Dimensions: 8.8 x 11 inches

Shipping Weight: 6.4 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (9 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #3,242,876 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #78 in [Books > Children's Books > Arts, Music & Photography > Music > Jazz](#) #1391 in [Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > History > United States > 1900s](#) #2846 in [Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Multicultural Stories > African-American](#)

## Customer Reviews

Jerry Pinkney collects vintage photographs, and it was those photos, along with the history of sharecroppers and their migration to the north, that inspired Pinkney to breathe new life into Billie Holiday's song "God Bless the Children" - not that the song needed new life, but it is a the perfect choice for the message Pinkney is trying to convey to young African-American readers--which is their history. The large book displays some memorable illustrations, each stretching across two pages. The illustrations are scenes in the life of a sharecropper family in the thirties: scenes of Bible reading, horse playing, working in the field, loading the car to move up north and scenes of the working and living in an industrial city. With the illustrations are the words to the song "God Bless the Child." The song becomes a beautiful story brought to life with these detailed, expressive images. They are absolutely beautiful; I just couldn't get enough of them. A free CD of Holiday's God Bless the Child can be found at the back of the book.

God Bless the Child is a masterpiece: visually stunning and emotionally appealing. Taking the words to Billie Holiday's and Arthur Herzog Jr.'s bluesy "God Bless the Child" as his text and inspiration, Pinkney depicts a family's move in the 1930s from the rural South to the industrialized North in what was known as the Great Migration. His exquisite "slice of life" watercolor paintings are wonderfully atmospheric, capturing perfectly the period and people. The final page is one of hope and the promise of a better future. The single painting shows a young boy sitting in a classroom holding a book, talking with his teacher. As Pinkney notes in an afterword, "At the time "God Bless the Child" was written, education was largely a privilege of the wealthy . . . Free public education was prized as the great equalizer-the stairway out of poverty for those with the courage and opportunity to climb it." This book is a labor of love. One can see this clearly in the facial expressions, the gestures, even the postures of the characters. No detail is neglected. Each page feels like an inexorable progression forward-even the endpapers. (The front endpapers show what appears to be a cabin's rough, wooden walls, while the endpapers in the back of the book show painted wallpaper.) This book receives our highest recommendation: Suitable for district-wide library acquisitions. Reviewed by the Education Oasis Staff

Rebeccasreads highly recommends GOD BLESS THE CHILD as a perfect gift for every family who has ever known struggle, & the excitement & loss that moving from a well-loved place to a new world brings. Exquisitely illustrated by the award-winning artist, Jerry Pinkney, GOD BLESS THE CHILD, is a glimpse into another time, hauntingly accompanied by the legendary singer Billie Holiday.

There are plenty of historical fiction picture books that take place during the Dust Bowl. And plenty that talk about segregation and sharecroppers in the 1930s. But what there aren't a lot of, at this time, are children's books about The Great Migration that began in the early 1900s and continued up until the 1950s. Few adults even know about this momentous turn in our nation's history, and fewer children still. And while I'm still sitting and waiting for the quintessential Great Migration 5th grade text (preferably written by Russell Freedman, if at all possible), I'm pleased to announce that at long last we finally have a picture book that displays this most important of historical turns. Artist Jerry Pinkney has taken Billie Holiday's second most famous song (I half wonder if a "Strange Fruit" picture book is in the works) and given it a story. Now, the tale told here is not as cut and dried as some might like. But true kudos to Mr. Pinkney for even thinking up such a fine way to tell of a

historical moment that deserves greater attention in our children's historical textbooks. The song "God Bless the Child" is accompanied by the visual tale of a family of black sharecroppers living in the deep south. Their work, as we can see, is hard and their lives worth more than what they get in such a hostile environment. With the promise of work in the big city, the family packs their belongings onto the roof of their car and take off. On one two-page spread (with no words) we see their abandoned home with the odds and ends of their former life left behind. The next two-page spread (also without words) shows the car driving beneath an awe-inspiring scene of true gritty industrialism. An elevated train winds its way over the busy streets below. The parents of the kids get jobs working in factories and sewing shops. The kids shine shoes or clamor for ice cream. As the words say, "Money, you got lots o' friends / Crowdin' round the door/ When you're gone and spendin' ends / They don't come no more". We can see that the kid who was shining shoes on one page had money to buy his friends treats. But on the next page he apparently has no money and stares down from his building's fire escape to the friendless ground below. But life gets better and in the end we can see one of the kids going off to school to get an education and take the opportunities that will be presented to him. I enjoyed the book a lot, but I did have a couple problems with it here and there. The story is an interesting one. I liked watching the family as the years passed. I was fairly certain that the little boy who wears a hat with earflaps and chases butterflies in the South earlier becomes the slightly older boy who shines shoes later (and may even be the boy getting an education at the end). But this is unclear. Pinkney doesn't clarify any of the family members. The parents are sometimes easy to identify (or at least the dad with the moustache is), but it takes some very careful and intense readings to figure out which child is which. I wish that the story itself had been clearer. If we are watching the little boy grow up and learn, it should be easy to understand. That way the reader gets a sense of satisfaction out of the end of the tale. But without knowing exactly who that kid is, you're left hanging. The ending of the tale could be any child which, while nice and all, isn't as satisfying as seeing a character you've come to care for accomplish something. Otherwise, this book is lovely. The pictures perfectly capture the time period. The cd that comes with the book and contains Billie Holiday singing "God Bless the Child" is lovely. But don't try to read the book as the song plays. Pinkney didn't design this book to read along with the music. There are sections where Ms. Holiday immediately leaps to a subsequent verse and the reader has to quickly skip through multiple two-page spreads to catch up. Instead, the music's just a nice freebie with an already pleasant book. Recently I read through "The Voice That Challenged a Nation: Marian Anderson and the Struggle For Equal Rights" by Russell Freedman and wished that it had had the foresight of "God Bless the Child" and included a cd of its own. So while this is not the

best historical picture book I've ever seen, it fills a huge historical gap. Let us hope that other books follow its example, though hopefully with stories that are a little clearer cut.

Accompanied by a CD of Billie Holiday singing "God Bless the Child" the reader is given a visual interpretation of the proverb "God blessed the child that's got his own," in which the illustrator has displayed the happenings of the Great Migration. Repeating the chorus of the song, we glimpse inside the lesson of making a way for yourself. "Mama may have, Papa may have, But God bless the child That's got his own! That's got his own." The illustrations capture the words in the story and serve as a tribute to our past as well as to those reading now who are committed to self-reliance and not only making do with what they have, but striving to become better. GOD BLESS THE CHILD is a wonderful book that I think children would enjoy, but more in a read-aloud atmosphere combined with the playing of the CD enclosed. Reviewed by Tee C. Royal of The RAWSISTAZ Reviewers

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