7TH GRADE
SBA REVIEW

BLUES FOR BOB E. BROWN

DETERMINE HOW LITERARY DEVICES CONVEY THE AUTHOR’S INTENT
CHARACTERIZATION
Blues for Bob E. Brown
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1  Maybe I ought to explain about that Bob E. Brown. See, when I decided to be a
blues man, Roberto Moreno didn’t sound right for that line of work. I was
already Bobby, and Moreno means brown in Spanish. And because there’s
already a rock singer named Bobby Brown, I came up with Bob E. Brown — the
“E” being for Ernesto. It sounds the same as Bobby. It’s just spelled different.

2  I didn’t want to admit I felt shaky. Sure, I had played at neighborhood places and
at assemblies in school. But this was different. This was professional.

3  When I came out, the trio was just finishing up. There was a light dusting of
applause. It seemed like the crowd was more interested in each other than in
what was happening onstage. Mary got up and announced, “Let’s have a nice
hand for the Milt Lewis Trio, folks.”

4  “Tonight,” Mary went on, “we have a special treat for you. A young man who’s
making his first appearance here at Mary’s, the home of good jazz and
blues. Please welcome a new generation blues man — Bob E. Brown!”

5  I swallowed a lump in my throat the size of a baseball and got onstage to some
indifferent applause. “Go get ‘em, rascal,” Mary whispered to me. I adjusted
the mike in front of the chair on the stage — I work sitting down — and went right
into a Bessie Smith tune, “Gimme a Pig’s Foot.”

6  Halfway through, I realized I was making as much impression as a snowball on a
brick wall. I started to feel dribbles of sweat creep down my back. What am
I doing here? I thought. I must have been crazy to try this! I finished the chorus
and went into my vocal.

7  That was when it happened. Something clicked in my mind. If these people didn’t
want to listen, that was okay. What I was doing was between me and my guitar.
If they liked it — swell. If they didn’t, I still had my music.

8  I threw back my head, not caring and sang, “Gimme a pig’s foot... ‘cause I don’t
care…” The house got quieter. Every now and then when I looked up, I could
see heads turning and faces looking at me. The sweat on my back and on the
palms of my hands started to dry out.

9  When I got to the last line, they began clapping. They applauded all the way
through the last four bars I played solo to finish the tune. I couldn’t believe
it. They liked me!
The next two tunes were a blur in my mind. Oh, I know what songs I did. I just don't remember paying attention to how I did them. All the hours and years of practice took over. I didn't watch my hands, like I usually do. I watched the faces of those people watching me. I sang to them, not at them.

I glanced over and saw Mary. She waved and put one index finger across the tip of the other to form the letter T. That meant it was time for me to do my last number.

For the first time, I spoke directly to the crowd. "Thank you very much," I said, my voice slightly shaky. "I'd like to finish up with a tune I learned from a recording by a New York blues man, Ivan Dark."

I went into the intro, and they were already clapping. I played the first chorus and went into the vocal. As I did, I was startled by the sound of the upright bass from behind me. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw that the Milt Lewis Trio had come onstage behind me.

Then we really started to cook. Milt Lewis plays alto sax, and with the bass and a drummer added, we did I don't know how many more choruses. I dropped into rhythm playing while everyone took his solo, then we all finished together.

Suddenly, Mary was at my side. "Let's hear it for Bob E. Brown!" she shouted over the din. "Bob E. Brown, ladies and gentlemen. Remember that name!"

QUESTIONS

1. “I swallowed a lump in my throat the size of a baseball and got onstage to some indifferent applause.” (Paragraph 5) What effect does the phrase “the size of a baseball” have in the sentence above?

   A. It indicates that Bob E. Brown feels sick.
   B. It emphasizes Bob E. Brown’s nervousness.
   C. It shows Bob E. Brown’s great love of performing before an audience.
   D. It builds excitement, as though Bob E. Brown is watching a close baseball game.

2. “Halfway through, I realized I was making as much impression as a snowball on a brick wall.” (Paragraph 6)
Which word below means the same as impression as it is used in the sentence above?

   A. suspicion
   B. imitation
   C. effect
   D. notch

3. How does the subjective point of view affect this passage?

   A. It gives the reader insight into the main character’s emotions.
   B. It helps the reader understand how it feels to play blues music.
   C. It allows the reader to understand the story from an objective outsider.
   D. It tells the reader how other characters feel about the main character.

4. Which sentence summarizes paragraph 10?

   A. Bob E. Brown realizes that the audience is watching him.
   B. Bob E. Brown grows more comfortable as he relaxes and enjoys performing.
   C. Bob E. Brown begins to play and does so without looking down at his guitar.
   D. Bob E. Brown manages to get through two songs despite forgetting exactly how to play them.

5. What is one way that the narrator conveys how Bob E. Brown’s feelings change in the passage?

   A. He tells how the Milt Lewis Trio comes onto the stage with him.
   B. He explains how he begins sweating and how his palms dry out.
   C. He describes the sound of the audience clapping after each song.
   D. He relates a story about playing during assemblies at his school.
6. Predict how Bob E. Brown will feel the next time he has a professional performance. Then, explain your prediction with information from the passage.

7. "Then we really started to cook." (Paragraph 14)
What does cook mean in the sentence above?

A. play very well together
B. prepare to play together
C. prepare a variety of fast songs and rhythms
D. play until the sweat rolled down their backs
ANSWERS

1. B
2. C
3. A
4. B
5. B
6. SA
7. A