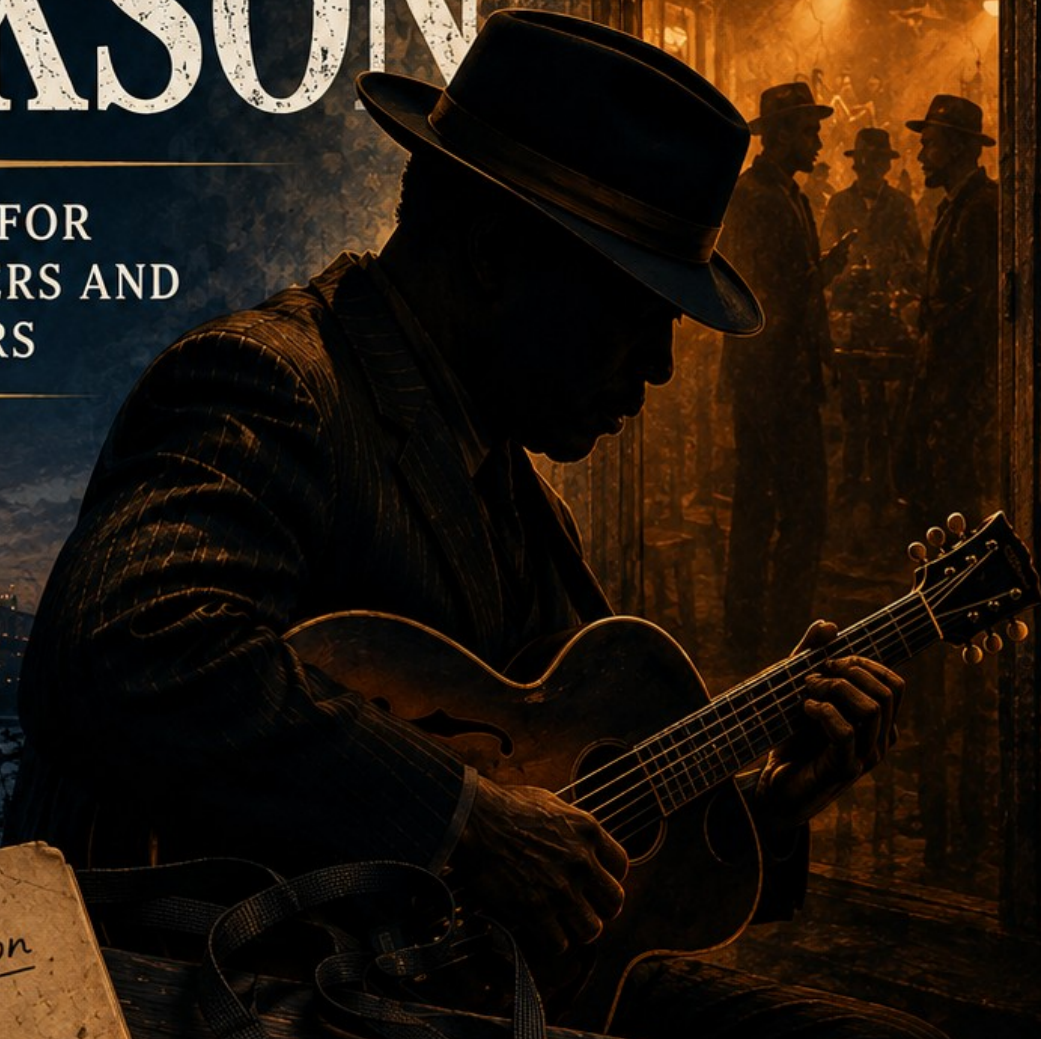


BLIND RABBIT JACKSON

A LESSON PLAN FOR
BELIEVERS, SEEKERS AND
STORYTELLERS

Live
BLUES
Tonight



Blind Rabbit Jackson

*Legend.
Genius.
Ghost.
Truth?*

PRESS

*"He may have been
a man. He may have been
a myth. But out here,
the story still plays."*

Blind Rabbit Jackson — Full Lesson Plan

*A Fantastic Tales short story and lesson plan,
courtesy of ManWrites.*

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Introductory Questions

1. What is the blues?
2. Where does the blues come from?
3. Is it possible for an old blues guitarist to just disappear?
4. What happens to them?

Blind Rabbit Jackson

The taxi pulled up in front of the only store in town.

It served as the only post office, coffee joint, bank on occasion, and just a general place for people to hang out.

“That’s it, right there,” said the driver.

Craig looked out at the nondescript flat-pack front of the store and turned back to the driver. The driver shook his head and gave a small shrug. “That’s it.”

Craig took a breath and grabbed his shoulder bag. It had been a very long day. In fact, it had been a very long two weeks. His editor had run out of patience.

“I don’t care how close you think you are,” he had told Craig.

“I need something from you very soon or don’t bother coming back.”

New York was a million miles away. Craig’s journey had taken him to New Orleans on a wild goose chase from bar to bar.

Everyone had a story to tell.

“Blind Rabbit Jackson? Yeah, I saw that cat play. Ain’t nobody played like him. Nobody.”

Bar owners, guitarists, promoters, singers. They all claimed to know Blind Rabbit Jackson and had seen him play a million times.

Guitarists told stories of playing duets with the man, ageing female singers told of love affairs, bar owners gazed into the distance and spoke with great reverence of the night the great Blind Rabbit Jackson had played in their bar, and how the place had never been so packed.

“I had everyone in here,” said one old guy. “Everyone. A who’s who of blues guitarists.”

One thing was certain. The man was a legend among other musicians. Other guitarists spoke of their love for Blind Rabbit Jackson as if he were a ghost that had just walked onto a stage and started playing.

“Y’all heard of that story of the crossroads,” said an elderly bluesman in the thousandth bar that Craig had visited.

“Robert Johnson, yes, of course,” said Craig.

The man grinned widely and let out a silent laugh. “Robert Johnson, yeah. Yeah, that’s right. You keep believing that.”

“But that’s the story,” said Craig. He leaned closer to the man. Craig had studied the history of great blues guitarists since his college days. He knew the music. He knew the men — and the women — who made the music.

“Let me tell you,” said the man, lifting a small glass filled with a dark brown liquor. It smelled of oak, old wood.

It smelled of the blues itself.

“Been all kinds of stories in this city over the years. But that story, the crossroads? That's all Blind Rabbit Jackson.”

Craig had pushed for more details, but the people that lived the music, they clammed up as soon as he asked for more information. He suddenly became invisible.

Now outside the old storefront, Craig was at the end of his tether. It was too hot; he was exhausted. He wanted to be back in New York, back in his simple, easy life.

He reached over and paid the driver, telling him to keep the change.

“Good luck, man,” he said and nodded to Craig before driving away.

Outside, the heat wrapped itself around his neck and shoulders. Its thin tentacles crawled into his every pore and settled there.

He pushed the door open and a small bell rang out above his head. He half-expected a cool blast of air to hit him in the face, but the stifling heat only seemed to close in around him.

Behind the counter, a black woman sat fanning herself with a newspaper. A radio played in the background.

Craig had his customer act down pat now. Go in some place, buy something, make some pleasantries. Gentle inquiries only, no need to go in too heavy.

“Hey,” he said to the woman.

“Hey,” she said back to him. She stretched the vowel sound out in a long and lazy drawl.

Craig walked over to the large refrigerator and inside saw a row of soda bottles, their glass surfaces glistening with condensation.

He pulled one out, raised it to his face and ran the ice-cold bottle across his cheek.

“Drinks are for buying, son.”

Craig turned to the voice and saw an ancient man sitting in a chair in the corner of the store.

His head was completely hairless apart from two small tufts of white hair behind his ears. His face was deeply lined, and his skin shone in the light coming through the store window.

“I’m sorry,” said Craig. “It’s just so hot.”

“I hear Canada is real nice this time of year,” said the old man without looking at Craig. His eyes remained fixed somewhere near the door.

He then let out a deep cackling laugh at his own joke.

He had no teeth, which somehow made his grin seem even wider.

Craig moved towards the counter of the store. “Canada is not really my thing,” he said.

The woman behind the counter shifted in her seat and then pushed a button on the old cash register. It popped open with a loud ting.

“Dollar fifty,” said the woman.

Craig handed some coins over and watched her face for any sign of curiosity or suspicion.

Craig knew how to read people. Years of journalism had taught him that.

There was a small bottle opener attached to the cracked wooden counter with a piece of string. Craig used it to pop the cap off his bottle. He took a long draught of it, savouring the cold as it ran down his throat.

“Go right ahead,” came the voice from the back. “We don’t charge for sitting. Make yourself at home.”

Craig caught the woman’s eye, and she gave him the barest hint of a smile.

“Don’t mind him none,” she said, her voice as mellow as a plucked A string. “He sits there all day. Ain’t nobody here wants to listen to his nonsense.”

Craig turned to the old man. “How much is sitting down tax?”

“Depends how long you plan on sitting around for.”

The old man turned his face towards the door as if to tell Craig that he best be using it for leaving and getting out of there.

“What about talking tax?” said Craig. “There a tax for that?”

The old man grunted. Craig took that as a positive response and shifted a little closer to him.

“This town looks a lot more accommodating than New Orleans,” he said, testing the waters.

The man grunted again. “New Orleans. Nobody got no business going there.”

He let out a short hiss of contempt.

Craig took another sip of his soda. He was so tired. He had come so far. And not a single clue to show for it.

“I was down there looking for someone,” he said.

“Oh, make no mistake,” said the man. “You’ll find someone there. Plenty of people around. They all want paying, but you’ll find someone.”

“The man I was looking for was a bluesman,” said Craig.

The old man’s eyes shifted for a split second and Craig thought their eyes might meet. But he blinked and stared back at the door.

“I was looking for a man by the name of Blind Rabbit Jackson,” said Craig. He scrutinised the man’s face for any sign, maybe the smallest flicker, a twitch at the corner of his eye.

But nothing. Not a flicker of recognition.

Finally, the old man spoke.

“All those bluesmen. They all got some name or another. And what kind of fool would call himself after a rabbit? Gotta be some kind of fool to do that.”

He grinned widely again and let out another cackle.

Craig breathed in and sighed deeply. “Yeah. But he was one of the best. One of the best-known blues guitarists—”

“And what do you know about it, son? They got the blues all the way up there in Canada?”

“I’m not from Canada—”

“Y’all come down here and think you know a thing about the blues just because you bought a couple of old 78s from — *what do they call that damn thing?* — eBay. Or whatever the hell that damn thing is.”

“I’m just asking,” said Craig. “I’m sorry if I —”

“You people don’t know nothing,” said the old man with a harsh finality.

Craig bristled. “You people?”

The old man pressed his lips together and let out another hiss.

“You news people,” he said quietly.

Craig finished his soda and returned to the counter.

“It was a pleasure meeting you, sir.”

“Pleasure’s all yours,” said the old man and cackled again.

Craig nodded to the woman behind the counter. “Thank you, ma’am.”

She nodded and gave him another faint smile.

Craig walked back out into the heat.

No need to write a story about the great Blind Rabbit Jackson after all.

Sometimes just meeting the man was enough.

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. Where does the story open, and how does Craig arrive there?
2. What different roles did the store in town serve for the community?
3. Why was Craig under pressure from his editor?
4. Where had Craig's search for Blind Rabbit Jackson taken him before he reached this town?
5. What did the first bar owner say when Craig mentioned Blind Rabbit Jackson?
6. How did other musicians speak about Blind Rabbit Jackson?
7. What did the old guy mean when he said he'd had “a who's who of blues guitarists” in his bar?
8. What did Craig believe the crossroads story was about?
9. How did the old bluesman respond when Craig mentioned Robert Johnson?
10. What did Craig know about the history of blues guitarists?
11. What was the old bluesman drinking, and how does Craig describe its smell?
12. According to the old bluesman, who does the crossroads story actually belong to?

13. What happened whenever Craig pushed people for more details about Blind Rabbit Jackson?
14. How did Craig feel by the time he reached the storefront?
15. What did the taxi driver say to Craig before driving away?
16. Who was behind the counter when Craig entered the store, and what was she doing?
17. What was Craig's usual approach for talking to people in a new place?
18. What did Craig do with the ice-cold soda bottle before buying it?
19. Who reprimanded Craig, and what did they say?
20. Describe the old man's physical appearance.
21. Why did the old man laugh after mentioning Canada?
22. How much did the soda cost, and how did Craig react while paying?
23. How did Craig open his bottle?
24. What did the woman say about the old man and his habit of talking?
25. What did Craig jokingly ask the old man about “sitting down tax”?
26. What did the old man think of New Orleans?
27. What did Craig say he had been doing in New Orleans?
28. How did the old man's eyes react when Craig mentioned he was looking for a bluesman?
29. How did the old man react when Craig said the name “Blind Rabbit Jackson”?

30. What was Craig looking for as he watched the old man's face?
31. What did the old man say about the way blues musicians name themselves?
32. What did Craig say about Blind Rabbit Jackson's reputation?
33. How did the old man respond when Craig described Blind Rabbit Jackson as “one of the best-known blues guitarists”?
34. What did the old man accuse Craig and people like him of not knowing?
35. What does the old man mock Craig for, regarding old records?
36. What did the old man say about “you people”?
37. What did the old man reveal when he said “you news people”?
38. How did Craig say goodbye to the old man?
39. How did the woman respond when Craig thanked her?
40. What does Craig decide about writing a story on Blind Rabbit Jackson?
41. What does the final line of the story suggest about Craig's encounter?

Blind Rabbit Jackson — Story and Reading Comprehension Questions

This is the story divided into clear sections with reading comprehension questions below each section. This format might be easier for certain classes. You can find the model answers for the questions at the end of the lesson plan.

Section 1

The taxi pulled up in front of the only store in town.

It served as the only post office, coffee joint, bank on occasion, and just a general place for people to hang out.

“That’s it, right there,” said the driver.

Craig looked out at the nondescript flat-pack front of the store and turned back to the driver. The driver shook his head and gave a small shrug. “That’s it.”

Craig took a breath and grabbed his shoulder bag. It had been a very long day. In fact, it had been a very long two weeks. His editor had run out of patience.

“I don’t care how close you think you are,” he had told Craig.

“I need something from you very soon or don’t bother coming back.”

New York was a million miles away. Craig’s journey had taken him to New Orleans on a wild goose chase from bar to bar.

Everyone had a story to tell.

“Blind Rabbit Jackson? Yeah, I saw that cat play. Ain’t nobody played like him. Nobody.”

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. Where does the story open, and how does Craig arrive there?
2. What different roles did the store in town serve for the community?
3. Why was Craig under pressure from his editor?
4. Where had Craig's search for Blind Rabbit Jackson taken him before he reached this town?
5. What did the first bar owner say when Craig mentioned Blind Rabbit Jackson?

Section 2

Bar owners, guitarists, promoters, singers. They all claimed to know Blind Rabbit Jackson and had seen him play a million times.

Guitarists told stories of playing duets with the man, ageing female singers told of love affairs, bar owners gazed into the distance and spoke with great reverence of the night the great Blind Rabbit Jackson had played in their bar, and how the place had never been so packed.

“I had everyone in here,” said one old guy. “Everyone. A who’s who of blues guitarists.”

One thing was certain. The man was a legend among other musicians. Other guitarists spoke of their love for Blind Rabbit Jackson as if he were a ghost that had just walked onto a stage and started playing.

“Y’all heard of that story of the crossroads,” said an elderly bluesman in the thousandth bar that Craig had visited.

“Robert Johnson, yes, of course,” said Craig.

The man grinned widely and let out a silent laugh. “Robert Johnson, yeah. Yeah, that’s right. You keep believing that.”

“But that’s the story,” said Craig. He leaned closer to the man. Craig had studied the history of great blues guitarists since his college days. He knew the music. He knew the men — and the women — who made the music.

Reading Comprehension Questions

6. How did other musicians speak about Blind Rabbit Jackson?
7. What did the old guy mean when he said he'd had “a who's who of blues guitarists” in his bar?
8. What did Craig believe the crossroads story was about?
9. How did the old bluesman respond when Craig mentioned Robert Johnson?
10. What did Craig know about the history of blues guitarists?

Section 3

“Let me tell you,” said the man, lifting a small glass filled with a dark brown liquor. It smelled of oak, old wood.

It smelled of the blues itself.

“Been all kinds of stories in this city over the years. But that story, the crossroads? That's all Blind Rabbit Jackson.”

Craig had pushed for more details, but the people that lived the music, they clammed up as soon as he asked for more information. He suddenly became invisible.

Now outside the old storefront, Craig was at the end of his tether. It was too hot; he was exhausted. He wanted to be back in New York, back in his simple, easy life.

He reached over and paid the driver, telling him to keep the change.

“Good luck, man,” he said and nodded to Craig before driving away.

Outside, the heat wrapped itself around his neck and shoulders. Its thin tentacles crawled into his every pore and settled there.

He pushed the door open and a small bell rang out above his head. He half-expected a cool blast of air to hit him in the face, but the stifling heat only seemed to close in around him.

Reading Comprehension Questions

11. What was the old bluesman drinking, and how does Craig describe its smell?

12. According to the old bluesman, who does the crossroads story actually belong to?

13. What happened whenever Craig pushed people for more details about Blind Rabbit Jackson?

14. How did Craig feel by the time he reached the storefront?

15. What did the taxi driver say to Craig before driving away?

Section 4

Behind the counter, a black woman sat fanning herself with a newspaper. A radio played in the background.

Craig had his customer act down pat now. Go in some place, buy something, make some pleasantries. Gentle inquiries only, no need to go in too heavy.

“Hey,” he said to the woman.

“Hey,” she said back to him. She stretched the vowel sound out in a long and lazy drawl.

Craig walked over to the large refrigerator and inside saw a row of soda bottles, their glass surfaces glistening with condensation.

He pulled one out, raised it to his face and ran the ice-cold bottle across his cheek.

“Drinks are for buying, son.”

Craig turned to the voice and saw an ancient man sitting in a chair in the corner of the store.

His head was completely hairless apart from two small tufts of white hair behind his ears. His face was deeply lined, and his skin shone in the light coming through the store window.

“I’m sorry,” said Craig. “It’s just so hot.”

“I hear Canada is real nice this time of year,” said the old man without looking at Craig. His eyes remained fixed somewhere near the door.

He then let out a deep cackling laugh at his own joke.

He had no teeth, which somehow made his grin seem even wider.

Reading Comprehension Questions

16. Who was behind the counter when Craig entered the store, and what was she doing?

17. What was Craig's usual approach for talking to people in a new place?

18. What did Craig do with the ice-cold soda bottle before buying it?

19. Who reprimanded Craig, and what did they say?

20. Describe the old man's physical appearance.

Section 5

Craig moved towards the counter of the store. “Canada is not really my thing,” he said.

The woman behind the counter shifted in her seat and then pushed a button on the old cash register. It popped open with a loud ting.

“Dollar fifty,” said the woman.

Craig handed some coins over and watched her face for any sign of curiosity or suspicion.

Craig knew how to read people. Years of journalism had taught him that.

There was a small bottle opener attached to the cracked wooden counter with a piece of string. Craig used it to pop the cap off his bottle. He took a long draught of it, savouring the cold as it ran down his throat.

“Go right ahead,” came the voice from the back. “We don’t charge for sitting. Make yourself at home.”

Craig caught the woman's eye, and she gave him the barest hint of a smile.

"Don't mind him none," she said, her voice as mellow as a plucked A string. "He sits there all day. Ain't nobody here wants to listen to his nonsense."

Craig turned to the old man. "How much is sitting down tax?"

"Depends how long you plan on sitting around for."

The old man turned his face towards the door as if to tell Craig that he best be using it for leaving and getting out of there.

Reading Comprehension Questions

21. Why did the old man laugh after mentioning Canada?

22. How much did the soda cost, and how did Craig react while paying?

23. How did Craig open his bottle?

24. What did the woman say about the old man and his habit of talking?

25. What did Craig jokingly ask the old man about "sitting down tax"?

Section 6

“What about talking tax?” said Craig. “There a tax for that?”

The old man grunted. Craig took that as a positive response and shifted a little closer to him.

“This town looks a lot more accommodating than New Orleans,” he said, testing the waters.

The man grunted again. “New Orleans. Nobody got no business going there.”

He let out a short hiss of contempt.

Craig took another sip of his soda. He was so tired. He had come so far. And not a single clue to show for it.

“I was down there looking for someone,” he said.

“Oh, make no mistake,” said the man. “You’ll find someone there. Plenty of people around. They all want paying, but you’ll find someone.”

“The man I was looking for was a bluesman,” said Craig.

The old man’s eyes shifted for a split second and Craig thought their eyes might meet. But he blinked and stared back at the door.

“I was looking for a man by the name of Blind Rabbit Jackson,” said Craig. He scrutinised the man’s face for any sign, maybe the smallest flicker, a twitch at the corner of his eye.

But nothing. Not a flicker of recognition.

Reading Comprehension Questions

26. What did the old man think of New Orleans?

27. What did Craig say he had been doing in New Orleans?

28. How did the old man's eyes react when Craig mentioned he was looking for a bluesman?

29. How did the old man react when Craig said the name “Blind Rabbit Jackson”?

30. What was Craig looking for as he watched the old man's face?

Section 7

Finally, the old man spoke.

“All those bluesmen. They all got some name or another. And what kind of fool would call himself after a rabbit? Gotta be some kind of fool to do that.”

He grinned widely again and let out another cackle.

Craig breathed in and sighed deeply. “Yeah. But he was one of the best. One of the best-known blues guitarists—”

“And what do you know about it, son? They got the blues all the way up there in Canada?”

“I’m not from Canada—”

“Y’all come down here and think you know a thing about the blues just because you bought a couple of old 78s from — *what do they call that damn thing?* — eBay. Or whatever the hell that damn thing is.”

Reading Comprehension Questions

31. What did the old man say about the way blues musicians name themselves?

32. What did Craig say about Blind Rabbit Jackson's reputation?

33. How did the old man respond when Craig described Blind Rabbit Jackson as “one of the best-known blues guitarists”?

34. What did the old man accuse Craig and people like him of not knowing?

35. What does the old man mock Craig for, regarding old records?

Section 8

“I’m just asking,” said Craig. “I’m sorry if I —”

“You people don’t know nothing,” said the old man with a harsh finality.

Craig bristled. “You people?”

The old man pressed his lips together and let out another hiss.

“You news people,” he said quietly.

Craig finished his soda and returned to the counter.

“It was a pleasure meeting you, sir.”

“Pleasure’s all yours,” said the old man and cackled again.

Craig nodded to the woman behind the counter. “Thank you, ma’am.”

She nodded and gave him another faint smile.

Craig walked back out into the heat.

No need to write a story about the great Blind Rabbit Jackson after all.

Sometimes just meeting the man was enough.

Reading Comprehension Questions

36. What did the old man say about “you people”?
37. What did the old man reveal when he said “you news people”?
38. How did Craig say goodbye to the old man?
39. How did the woman respond when Craig thanked her?
40. What does Craig decide about writing a story on Blind Rabbit Jackson?
41. What does the final line of the story suggest about Craig's encounter?

Essential Vocabulary

served as	nondescript	shrug
editor	run out of patience	wild goose chase
guitarist	legend	crossroads
elderly	bluesman	clammed up
storefront	at the end of his tether	exhausted
keep the change	tentacles	stifling
counter	down pat	drawl
condensation	ice-cold	ancient
deeply lined	cackling	cash register
curiosity	suspicion	read people
draught	savouring	barest
nonsense	reverence	accommodating
hiss	contempt	clue
make no mistake	scrutinised	flicker
twitch	harsh finality	faint

Vocabulary Practice

Follow the steps below to help you learn and remember new words and phrases more effectively:

1. Write each new word or phrase in your vocabulary notebook.
2. Look up the meaning of each word in your dictionary. Write a clear and simple definition next to the word.
3. Create your own sentence using the word or phrase correctly. Try to make the sentence meaningful and connected to your own life or experiences.

Examples

Nondescript – having no distinctive or memorable features.

Example sentence: The café was a nondescript little place, easy to walk right past.

Reverence – deep respect or admiration.

Example sentence: The old man was treated with great reverence by everyone in the village.

Why do this?

Doing this regularly will help you improve all areas of your English — reading, writing, speaking, and listening. By writing definitions and making your own examples, you are actively using the language, which helps it stick in your memory.

Vocabulary Practice Exercise

Match each word (1–15) with its correct definition (a–o).

Word	Write letter here →
1. nondescript	
2. wild goose chase	
3. down pat	
4. drawl	
5. condensation	
6. ancient	
7. cackle	
8. reverence	
9. contempt	
10. clue	
11. scrutinised	
12. flicker	
13. twitch	
14. harsh	
15. finality	

Definitions:

a. small drops of water that form on a cold surface

- b. a small piece of information that helps solve a mystery
- c. a brief, unsteady spark of light or emotion
- d. a feeling that something deserves no respect
- e. the quality of being complete and beyond argument
- f. thoroughly practised and memorised
- g. deep respect or admiration
- h. a slow way of speaking in which vowel sounds are drawn out
- i. a pointless search that leads nowhere
- j. very old
- k. a loud, harsh laugh
- l. looked at closely and critically
- m. severe or unpleasant, especially in tone
- n. having no distinctive or memorable features
- o. to make a small, sudden jerking movement

True or False

Read the statements below and decide if they are True or False. You can find all the correct answers at the end of the lesson plan.

1. Craig has been away from New York for about two weeks.
2. The store in town only sells drinks.
3. Everyone Craig meets in New Orleans gives him solid, reliable facts about Blind Rabbit Jackson.
4. The old bluesman says the crossroads story belongs to Robert Johnson.
5. Craig pays for the soda before he opens and drinks it.
6. The old man in the store has a full head of hair.
7. The woman behind the counter tells Craig not to mind the old man.
8. The old man reacts immediately when Craig first mentions Blind Rabbit Jackson.
9. The old man calls Craig and people like him “news people.”
10. Craig decides to write a big article revealing everything about Blind Rabbit Jackson.

What is the Correct Synonym?

A synonym is a word of similar meaning. Match each word from the story with its synonym from the box below.

Word Box: *unremarkable, worn out, suffocating, aged, veneration, ageing, disdain, examined, slight, severe*

1. nondescript → _____
2. exhausted → _____
3. stifling → _____
4. ancient → _____
5. reverence → _____
6. elderly → _____
7. contempt → _____
8. scrutinised → _____
9. faint → _____
10. harsh → _____

What is the Correct Antonym?

An antonym is a word of opposite meaning. Match each word from the story with its antonym from the box below.

Word Box: *distinctive, energetic, refreshing, modern, irreverence, youthful, respect, ignored, obvious, gentle*

1. nondescript → _____
2. exhausted → _____
3. stifling → _____
4. ancient → _____
5. reverence → _____
6. elderly → _____
7. contempt → _____
8. scrutinised → _____
9. faint → _____
10. harsh → _____

Words and Meanings

Match each expression from the story (1–10) with its correct meaning (a–j).

1. at the end of his tether
2. down pat
3. clammed up
4. a wild goose chase
5. keep the change
6. faint smile
7. to read people
8. make no mistake
9. harsh finality
10. testing the waters

Meanings:

- a. suddenly stopped talking
- b. tell someone to keep the extra money as a tip
- c. thoroughly practised and memorised
- d. a tone that closes off any further discussion
- e. exhausted, with no patience left
- f. without doubt, certainly
- g. a smile that is hardly noticeable

- h. a search that leads nowhere useful
- i. cautiously trying to find out how someone might react
- j. to judge someone's character or mood accurately

Gap Fill Exercise

Look at the word bank below. Complete each sentence with the correct word. Not all words will be used.

Word Box: *nondescript, exhausted, stifling, ancient, reverence, contempt, scrutinised, cackle, drawl, elderly*

1. The office building was so _____ that nobody could tell you what company was inside without checking the sign.
2. After the marathon, she felt completely _____ and could barely stand.
3. The classroom felt _____ in the summer heat, with no air conditioning.
4. The museum displayed an _____ vase that was over three thousand years old.
5. The soldiers stood in _____ as the flag was slowly raised.
6. He looked at the offer with _____, refusing to even consider it.
7. The teacher _____ the essay carefully, checking every sentence for errors.
8. The witch's _____ echoed through the forest in the old fairy tale.
9. She spoke with a soft southern _____ that made her stories even more charming.

10. My _____ neighbour still tends her garden every morning.

Colloquial English

Some of the characters in this story use informal and regional forms of American English.

Below are some examples from the story.

Do you know what they mean?

How could you express the same ideas in more standard or formal English?

“Yeah, I saw that cat play.”

“Ain't nobody played like him. Nobody.”

“Y'all heard of that story of the crossroads.”

“Y'all come down here and think you know a thing about the blues just because you bought a couple of old 78s from — what do they call that damn thing? — eBay.”

“That's all Blind Rabbit Jackson.”

“Dollar fifty.”

“Drinks are for buying, son.”

“Go right ahead. We don't charge for sitting. Make yourself at home.”

“Don't mind him none.”

“Ain't nobody here wants to listen to his nonsense.”

“Nobody got no business going there.”

“They all want paying, but you'll find someone.”

*“And what kind of fool would call himself after a rabbit?
Gotta be some kind of fool to do that.”*

“You people don't know nothing.”

“You news people.”

“Pleasure's all yours.”

Discussion Questions

1. What is the setting of the story, and how does it contribute to the atmosphere?
2. Describe the main character, Craig. What is he looking for, and why?
3. What is Craig's job? What clues reveal this before the old man finally calls him one of the “news people”?
4. Who is Blind Rabbit Jackson, and why is he significant in the story?
5. Why is Craig so determined to find Blind Rabbit Jackson?
6. Within the story, do you think Blind Rabbit Jackson really exists, or has he become more of a legend? Why is he so revered and admired?
7. How do the various people Craig encounters in his journey view Blind Rabbit Jackson?
8. What role does music, specifically blues music, play in the story's plot and theme?
9. Discuss the relationship between Craig and the old man in the store. How does the old man's attitude toward Craig change throughout their conversation?
10. How does the story explore themes of cultural differences and misunderstandings?
11. What does the old man mean when he refers to “you people” and “news people”? How does this reflect his perspective on outsiders?

12. Describe the dynamics between Craig and the woman behind the counter. How does her attitude differ from the old man's?
13. How does the story portray the idea of legends and myths, especially in the context of Blind Rabbit Jackson's identity?
14. How does the heat and the setting contribute to the overall mood of the story?
15. What does the interaction with Blind Rabbit Jackson symbolise in the story?
16. Compare and contrast Blind Rabbit Jackson with the story of Robert Johnson and the Crossroads. What similarities and differences do you notice?
17. What do you know about blues music? Is it popular in your country?
18. What do blues singers and musicians sing about? Why do they sing about this?
19. Is there a singer or musician in your country that has a kind of mythological status?
20. Why do certain singers and musicians have so many stories about them?
21. If you were Craig and you were in the shop, what would you ask the old man?
22. What about the woman in the shop — what would you ask her?
23. Do you think people were unwilling to help Craig? Why or why not?

24. When Craig gets back to New York, what will he tell his editor? Will the editor be angry with him?

25. What did you think of this story? Was it interesting?

Role Play: Calling the Editor

This is a role play activity.

There are two characters in the role play.

1. Craig
2. Craig's Editor

The Situation

After leaving the store, Craig calls his editor in New York. He still has no interview, no photograph, and no solid proof that Blind Rabbit Jackson is real — only a strange, memorable encounter with an old man in a small-town store. The editor is losing patience and wants to know what Craig actually has to show for two weeks away. Together, they need to decide what happens next: does Craig come home empty-handed, keep searching, or try to write about the encounter itself?

In pairs, create a conversation that you can present to the class.

Take some time to prepare your role play.

When you are ready, show the class.

Debate: Should Journalists Always Try to Uncover the Full Truth Behind a Legend?

The Motion

“This house believes that some legends are better left unexplained.”

Option A — Full Two-Team Debate

Divide the class into two teams.

Team A — For the Motion

You must argue that legends lose their power once they are fully explained, chasing hard proof can destroy something valuable and meaningful to a community, and not every mystery needs to be solved for a story to be worth telling.

Team B — Against the Motion

You must argue that readers and audiences deserve the truth, unexplained mysteries can be exploited or twisted into false stories, and documenting real facts protects real people and real history.

Preparation (10 minutes)

Each team should prepare their arguments. Think about:

- Who is most affected when a legend is fully explained, and who benefits from it staying a mystery?
- What might a community or a story lose if every mystery is investigated and explained?
- Should journalists always try to find the full truth, even if it damages something valuable?
- Are there situations where walking away from a story, rather than writing it, is the right decision?

The Debate

1. Team A gives an opening statement (2 minutes).
2. Team B gives an opening statement (2 minutes).
3. Rebuttal round — each team responds to the other's points (2 minutes each).
4. Closing statements — each team sums up their strongest argument (1 minute each).

The Vote

After the debate, the rest of the class votes on which side made the more convincing argument. The teacher can act as moderator and timekeeper throughout.

Option B — Simplified Class Discussion

If a full debate doesn't suit the class, the teacher can instead run this as an open discussion: pose the motion to the whole class, and go around asking individual students whether they agree or disagree and why. The teacher moderates, encourages disagreement, and draws out different opinions rather than assigning fixed sides.

Writing

This is a journalistic writing exercise.

Imagine you are Craig in the story.

You have travelled all the way down to New Orleans in a quest to meet the legend Blind Rabbit Jackson.

But you find out nothing.

Until you end up in a small store in a little town outside New Orleans.

You are not sure, but you think you just encountered the living legend himself.

The very man — Blind Rabbit Jackson.

Now you are going to write your story.

How you travelled all the way to New Orleans. How you met so many bluesmen — and blueswomen too — and heard all their stories.

Then finally, you think you met Blind Rabbit Jackson sitting in a store.

Your article should include:

- a headline
- an introduction explaining Craig's search
- what people in New Orleans told him
- his encounter with the old man
- why he suspects the man was Blind Rabbit Jackson
- a conclusion explaining whether the mystery should remain unsolved

Write your article.

When you have finished, read your article out loud in front of the class.

Or give it to your teacher for review.

Reading Comprehension Questions — Answers

1. The story opens outside the only store in a small town, where Craig arrives by taxi.
2. It served as the post office, coffee joint, occasional bank, and a general place for people to hang out.
3. Craig had been away for two weeks and his editor had run out of patience, demanding he produce something soon or return to New York.
4. It had taken him to New Orleans, on what felt like a wild goose chase from bar to bar.
5. He said he had seen Blind Rabbit Jackson play and that nobody played like him.
6. They spoke of him with great reverence and love, almost as if he were a ghost who simply appeared on stage.
7. He meant that on the night Blind Rabbit Jackson played, his bar had been packed with practically every famous blues guitarist around.
8. Craig believed it was the well-known legend of Robert Johnson selling his soul at the crossroads.
9. He grinned, laughed quietly, and told Craig sarcastically to “keep believing that.”
10. He had studied it since his college days and knew the men and women who made the music.

11. He was drinking a dark brown liquor that smelled of oak and old wood — Craig says it smelled of the blues itself.
12. He says the crossroads story is “all Blind Rabbit Jackson.”
13. They clammed up, and it was as if Craig suddenly became invisible to them.
14. He was at the end of his tether — exhausted, too hot, and longing for his simple life back in New York.
15. He said “Good luck, man,” and nodded before driving off.
16. A black woman was behind the counter, fanning herself with a newspaper while a radio played in the background.
17. He had his “customer act” down pat — go in, buy something, make pleasantries, and ask gentle questions without pushing too hard.
18. He held it in his hand and ran its ice-cold surface across his cheek to cool himself down.
19. An old man sitting in the corner said, “Drinks are for buying, son.”
20. He was completely hairless apart from two small tufts of white hair behind his ears, had a deeply lined face, and no teeth, which made his grin seem even wider.
21. He was making a sarcastic joke, suggesting Craig should go somewhere cooler since he was complaining about the heat.
22. It cost a dollar fifty; Craig handed over coins while watching the woman's face for any sign of curiosity or suspicion.

23. He used a small bottle opener attached to the counter with a piece of string.

24. She said not to mind him, that he sits there all day with nobody to listen to his nonsense.

25. He asked how much the “sitting down tax” was, and later whether there was a “talking tax” too.

26. He said nobody had any business going there, and let out a hiss of contempt.

27. He said he had been there looking for someone.

28. His eyes shifted for a split second, as though he might finally meet Craig's gaze, but he blinked and looked back at the door.

29. He showed no reaction at all — not a single movement or flicker.

30. He was looking for any sign, even the smallest flicker or twitch, that would show the old man recognised the name.

31. He said that blues musicians all seemed to have some kind of unusual name, then joked that only a fool would name himself after a rabbit.

32. He said he was one of the best, one of the best-known blues guitarists.

33. He cut Craig off and asked mockingly what he could possibly know about it, since he was “from Canada.”

34. He said “you people don't know nothing” about the blues.

35. He mocked him for thinking he understood the blues just because he had bought a couple of old 78s on eBay.

36. He said “you people don't know nothing,” dismissing Craig with harsh finality.

37. He revealed that he knew Craig was a journalist, not just a curious visitor.

38. He politely said, “It was a pleasure meeting you, sir,” to which the old man replied sarcastically, “Pleasure's all yours.”

39. She nodded and gave him another faint smile.

40. He decides there is no need to write any story about him at all.

41. It suggests that meeting the old man may have been Craig's real encounter with Blind Rabbit Jackson himself, and that some experiences matter more than turning them into a published story.

True or False — Answers

1. True.
2. False. In fact, the store also serves as the post office, coffee joint, occasional bank, and general hang-out spot.
3. False. In fact, people mostly tell him vague, admiring stories and clam up when he pushes for real details.
4. False. In fact, he insists the crossroads story is “all Blind Rabbit Jackson.”
5. True.
6. False. In fact, his head is completely hairless apart from two small tufts of white hair behind his ears.
7. True.
8. False. In fact, he stays completely still and shows no reaction at first.
9. True.
10. False. In fact, Craig decides there is no need to write any story at all.

What is the Correct Synonym? — Answers

1. nondescript = unremarkable
2. exhausted = worn out
3. stifling = suffocating
4. ancient = aged
5. reverence = veneration
6. elderly = ageing
7. contempt = disdain
8. scrutinised = examined
9. faint = slight
10. harsh = severe

What is the Correct Antonym? — Answers

1. nondescript ↔ distinctive
2. exhausted ↔ energetic
3. stifling ↔ refreshing
4. ancient ↔ modern
5. reverence ↔ irreverence
6. elderly ↔ youthful
7. contempt ↔ respect
8. scrutinised ↔ ignored
9. faint ↔ obvious
10. harsh ↔ gentle

Words and Meanings — Answers

1. at the end of his tether = e (exhausted, with no patience left)
2. down pat = c (thoroughly practised and memorised)
3. clammed up = a (suddenly stopped talking)
4. a wild goose chase = h (a search that leads nowhere useful)
5. keep the change = b (tell someone to keep the extra money as a tip)
6. faint smile = g (a smile that is hardly noticeable)
7. to read people = j (to judge someone's character or mood accurately)
8. make no mistake = f (without doubt, certainly)
9. harsh finality = d (a tone that closes off any further discussion)
10. testing the waters = i (cautiously trying to find out how someone might react)

Gap Fill Exercise — Answers

1. nondescript
2. exhausted
3. stifling
4. ancient
5. reverence
6. contempt
7. scrutinised
8. cackle
9. drawl
10. elderly

Vocabulary Practice Exercise — Answers

1. n (having no distinctive or memorable features)
2. i (a pointless search that leads nowhere)
3. f (thoroughly practised and memorised)
4. h (a slow way of speaking in which vowel sounds are drawn out)
5. a (small drops of water that form on a cold surface)
6. j (very old)
7. k (a loud, harsh laugh)
8. g (deep respect or admiration)
9. d (a feeling that something deserves no respect)
10. b (a small piece of information that helps solve a mystery)
11. l (looked at closely and critically)
12. c (a brief, unsteady spark of light or emotion)
13. o (to make a small, sudden jerking movement)
14. m (severe or unpleasant, especially in tone)
15. e (the quality of being complete and beyond argument)

Colloquial English — Answers

Here are more formal English equivalents for each colloquial phrase from the story.

Colloquial English	Formal English
<i>"Yeah, I saw that cat play."</i>	"Yes, I saw that man perform."
<i>"Ain't nobody played like him. Nobody."</i>	"Nobody plays like him. Nobody at all."
<i>"Y'all heard of that story of the crossroads."</i>	"Have you all heard the story about the crossroads?"
<i>"Y'all come down here and think you know a thing about the blues just because you bought a couple of old 78s from — what do they call that damn thing? — eBay."</i>	"People who travel here seem to think they understand the blues simply because they bought a couple of old records online."
<i>"That's all Blind Rabbit Jackson."</i>	"That story belongs entirely to Blind Rabbit Jackson."
<i>"Dollar fifty."</i>	"That will be one dollar and fifty cents."
<i>"Drinks are for buying, son."</i>	"You need to pay for that before you use it."
<i>"Go right ahead. We don't</i>	"Please, go ahead. There is

Colloquial English	Formal English
<i>charge for sitting. Make yourself at home."</i>	no charge for sitting down. Make yourself comfortable."
<i>"Don't mind him none."</i>	"Don't pay him any attention."
<i>"Ain't nobody here wants to listen to his nonsense."</i>	"No one here wants to listen to what he says."
<i>"Nobody got no business going there."</i>	"Nobody has any good reason to go there."
<i>"They all want paying, but you'll find someone."</i>	"They all expect to be paid, but you will find someone."
<i>"And what kind of fool would call himself after a rabbit? Gotta be some kind of fool to do that."</i>	"What kind of fool would name himself after a rabbit? Only a fool would do something like that."
<i>"You people don't know nothing."</i>	"People like you don't know anything."
<i>"You news people."</i>	"You people who work in journalism."
<i>"Pleasure's all yours."</i>	"The pleasure is entirely yours." (said sarcastically, reversing the polite phrase "the pleasure is all mine")

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