

A Guide for Teachers, Librarians and Book Groups

Janis Joplin: Rise Up Singing

By
Ann Angel



Introducing *Janis Joplin Rise Up Singing*:

A pioneer in the male-dominated rock scene of the late 60s, Janis Joplin redefined a woman's place in music the moment she took the stage. Audiences bowed before her when she would belt out her blues influenced songs. In **JANIS JOPLIN: *Rise Up Singing*** by Ann Angel (Amulet Books; October 2010) provides an intimate look, through archival photos and all-new interviews with family, friends, and bandmates, at Joplin's life before, during, and after her reign as "The First Queen of Rock and Roll."

Starting with her teen years in Port Arthur, Texas, Joplin is introduced not as a musician but a budding painter, and social outcast, who yearned to break free of her small town—and it's small-minded thinking. Upon discovering her passion for blues music and performing, she would then travel to Venice, Ca, Austin, New York City, and back to San Francisco finding gigs, public adoration, and critical success along the way, although she could never outrun heartbreak, her personal insecurities and harboring addictions. But Joplin's issues are ones that everyone can relate to on some level, and despite her long-standing troubles it's her ambition, determination, and conviction that made her a force to reckon with and an icon for a generation.

Ann Angel responds to the question Why Janis?

This seems to be the most popular question I'm being asked about choosing to write this biography. Choosing to write a biography begins by choosing to spend at least a year or two with someone I admire for one reason or another. In Janis's case, this was an easy choice because I'll never forget the first time I heard her voice come over the radio. I was completely blown away by that powerful bluesy sound! I couldn't get enough of Janis as a teen, buying her records and then her albums, listening to them until they were all scratched and worn and then going out and purchasing more. I ate up everything I could read about her and learned that behind that powerful voice was a unique and talented woman who had broken into the ranks of the all-male celebrity of rock and roll. She stood right alongside bad boys and hard playing stars such as Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison and kept right up with them. It seemed she strutted with the ability not to care that she was out of the traditionally feminine element. I loved that about her. I wanted to mimic it. She taught me not to want to go along with the popular crowd but to do my own thing and pursue my own talents. It was later that I learned Janis also had vulnerability, a dark side, an amazing insecurity and need to be loved. And it was much later still, after her death, that fans like me discovered the details of Janis's tragic death. She became my cautionary tale. I felt compelled to share with teens what I know and love and learned about Janis's life. Hers is the story of a musical icon and role model even as it serves as cautionary tale.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) When comparing Janis's teen years to your own, what elements of Janis's search for independence seem consistent with the struggle all teens experience? How was Janis's teen experience unique to her community and the culture of the late 1950s and early sixties?
- 2) Some of Janis Joplin's early role models were classic blues artists like Billie Holiday and Bessie Smith. Listen to some of these songs.
 - a. What elements of these early blues carried over to Janis's rock interpretations of the blues?
 - b. How do you think the sound of early recordings affect the experience of listening to this music?
- 3) Which of Janis's characteristics demonstrate positive character and which of her characteristics demonstrate vulnerability? Of these which do you believe is worth emulating and why?
- 4) What is it about rock and roll that draws fans and how do they respond to this music?
- 5) While seeking independence in a conservative world, Janis pushed boundaries. What boundaries did she push and how do you believe she affected cultural change by doing so?
- 6) Teens in Janis's day chafed at the conservative values of their parents and made choices far different from their parents. From the perspective of a changing world which choices can still be seen and felt today?
- 7) Janis took risks in her music and in her life. Of the risks she took, which defined her generation?
- 8) Of the albums that Janis made, critics focus on different strengths such as instruments, vocals and beat to discuss which is her strongest work. What do you believe is Janis's strongest work and why?
- 9) There is definitely a narrative viewpoint or perspective that readers can perceive in this biography of Janis Joplin. Ann Angel has said she had a "fan-crush" on Janis while she was growing up.
 - a. How does this narrator's perspective of Janis come through?
 - b. Can you find a passage that demonstrates Angel's passion for Janis's music or a passage that demonstrates Angel's empathy for Janis?
- 10) If you compare Janis's music and celebrity to contemporary musicians, whom would you choose and what characteristics are similar to Janis's? Which are different?
- 11) How has media and technological advances changed access to celebrities?
- 12) If you could give Janis one piece of advice, what would it be and why?

Additional Resources:

Websites:

www.abramsbooks.com/amulet

www.annangelwriter.com

www.bbhc.com

<http://www.fanpop.com/spots/janis-joplin>

www.janisjoplin.com

www.janisjoplin.net

<http://www.janisjoplin.net/forum>

<http://rockhall.com/inductees/janis-joplin/bio/>

Movies:

Beaches with Bette Midler

The Complete Monterey Pop Festival

Festival Express – the Canadian train tour

Janis Joplin: Final 24: Her Final Hours

Nine Hundred Nights: Big Brother and the Holding Company with Janis Joplin

The Rose with Bette Midler

A Star is Born with Barbra Streisand

Woodstock: 3 Days of Peace & Music, Director's Cut

More Women in Rock and Roll:

www.jossstone.com

www.ladygaga.com

www.melissaetheridge.com

www.pinkspage.com