B.B. King Reader’s Theatre (9 – 12)

To the readers: The content for this reader’s theatre was assembled from several sources that are cited within each section of the text. The citations do not need to be spoken aloud. It might be helpful to use a highlight pen to mark your part, and the parts for all. Listen to others in your group as you read with them, so that your voices and words will blend into one sound. If you are reading a part by yourself, be sure to use a strong voice and clear diction.

All

B. King has been on the road since before it was paved.

Voices 1, 2, 3

Now in his 80s, he’s still pursuing a career he began in the late 1940s, and continues to play more than 100 dates a year.

– interview with Ted Drozdowski

Voices 4, 5, 6

He started life as Riley B. King in one of America’s most impoverished places, the Mississippi Delta.

Voices 4 & 5

He had little but the dream in his heart and a destiny that would take him around the world.

Voices 5 & 6

Now he’s an international music icon,

Voices 4, 5, 6

and Blues aficionados from all over the planet want to hear more and know more about B.B. King.


All

King remains the world’s most influential guitarist, instantly recognizable by a single note.

Voices 7, 8, 9

His sustained vibrato, elegant bending and phrasing, and resolute swing has inspired musicians of all genres.

All

And through it all his Gibson guitar, Lucille, has been at his side.

– interview with Ted Drozdowski

Voices 10, 11, 12

King has a reputation for being one of the nicest, most gracious men in show business.

– interview with Ted Drozdowski

All

Civility is the cornerstone of B.B. King’s character.

– David Ritz, Blues All Around Me

B.B. King 1

I was born in the great Mississippi Delta, that part of America that someone called the most southern place on earth. Born on September 16, 1925, on the bank of Blue Lake, between Indianola and Greenwood, near the tiny villages of Itta Bena and Berclair.
Daddy was Albert Lee King and named me Riley B. The “B.” didn’t stand for anything. – B.B. King, *Blues All Around Me*, with David Ritz

I grew up on the plantation in overalls. That’s all I had to wear. I swore to God that if I lived to be a man, I would have other types of clothes to wear. I have a few pairs of jeans, but I don’t wear them around the stage. – interview with Ted Drozdowski

I grew up in a segregated society and I learned I can get things done much better by talking to a person with an even temperament. I find just talkin’ straight to a person, giving them the facts, they usually pay attention and listen at least somewhat. – interview with Ted Drozdowski

This is my belief. I believe that I’m never any better than my last concert.

I believe that each night I do a concert or do a show it’s like an audition, ’cause I remember the days when it was. If you played a night and somebody came in the next night and played better than you, you didn’t come back.

So I still have that mentality if that’s a word to use. That if these people didn’t like me, what would I be doing. Probably plowing. – B.B. King, *B.B. King Treasures*, B.B. King with Dick Waterman

B. B. is king. His heart-and-soul music has inspired me ever since I was a little boy. I truly believe he has influenced generations of singers and musicians. To me he’s one of our great masters. – Stevie Wonder, quoted in *Blues All Around Me*, B. B. King, with David Ritz

You know, I think B. showed a degree of adaptability that was acceptable to very, very few of the blues singers. He had a commitment to self-improvement that was not unique, but uncommon in any field, and particularly in the blues field.

He was dedicated always to improving himself and his position, from the very beginning, from the very start of his career in music. – Peter Guralnick, in *B.B. King Treasures*, B.B. King with Dick Waterman

Without a doubt, B.B. King has influenced more rock and blues musicians than anyone else in history.
There is simply no one else with more raw passion or eloquence...There are reasons why he’s been loved and revered for so long – it’s the dignity and heart he brings to his life as well as his music.

– Bonnie Raitt, quoted in *Blues All Around Me*, B.B. King, with David Ritz

The elements of B’s art that struck me as a kid are the elements that sustain me as an adult – the piercing sound of his guitar, the full-throated sincerity of his singing, the deep grooves in which he moves, and his towering emotional commitment to his audience.

– David Ritz, *Blues All Around Me*

Sincere expression, beginning in speech, is the basis of B’s music. I love hearing the patterns of speech in his music and the patterns of his music in his speech. The two are deeply intermingled and wonderfully complimentary.

– David Ritz, *Blues All Around Me*

Without question, blues is America’s greatest music. Without the blues we would not have rock and roll, country, gospel, jazz.

– Bill Ferris, former chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities as quoted in *B.B. King Treasures*, B.B. King, with Dick Waterman

The most important figure in the blues is B.B. King.

– Bill Ferris, *B.B. King Treasures*, B.B. King with Dick Waterman

He is really a humble man who has been given a gift, and thoroughly enjoys sharing it.

– Floyd Lieberman, B.B. King’s manager, *B.B. King Treasures*