

Questions on *Sonny's Blues* by James Baldwin:

1. *Sonny's Blues* begins *in medias res*. What does Baldwin achieve by beginning the story as he does? How does the order in which events are related later in the story affect your experience of reading it and interpreting its meaning?
2. What external conflict(s) is (or are) depicted in the story? What internal conflict(s)? How are they resolved?
3. James Baldwin famously avowed that “[i]t is only in his music [...] that the Negro in America has been able to tell his story,” and music of various kinds features prominently in *Sonny's Blues*. Note all the times when music is mentioned, as well as all of the varieties of music. What story seems to be told both *through* and *about* music in *Sonny's Blues*?
4. How do you react to Baldwin's change of prose style in describing the scene at the nightclub? How does the change of style contribute to his message? In what ways does it make his message harder to decipher?
5. How should we read the reference to the “cup of trembling” in the last paragraph of the story? Should we read it to mean that trembling and fury will be visited on whites (“them that afflict thee”)? Or pushers? Or is the full biblical passage not relevant? Would whites or blacks be more likely to recognize Baldwin's allusion?