

Reel History

Parent Guide

Read the “Directions” sheets for specific instructions.

SUMMARY

In this activity, children will watch a short silent film recorded in 1930 and get a sense of a Harlem club during the Jazz Age.

WHY

This activity will get children thinking about how different kinds of recordings capture different kinds of information.

TIME

- 10–20 minutes

RECOMMENDED AGE GROUP

This activity will work best for children in 1st through 4th grade.

CHALLENGE WORDS

- **Newsreel:** a short motion picture dealing with current events

GET READY

- Read *Duke Ellington: The Piano Prince and His Orchestra*, a beautiful picture-book biography of one of America’s most famous jazz musicians. For tips on reading this book together, check out the Guided Reading Activity (http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/pdf/jazz/jazz_reading.pdf).
- Read the Step Back in Time sheets.

YOU NEED

- Directions sheet (*attached*)
- Step Back in Time sheets (*attached*)
- Computer with Internet and speakers or headphones
- *Duke Ellington* book

More information at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/jazz/>.

Reel History

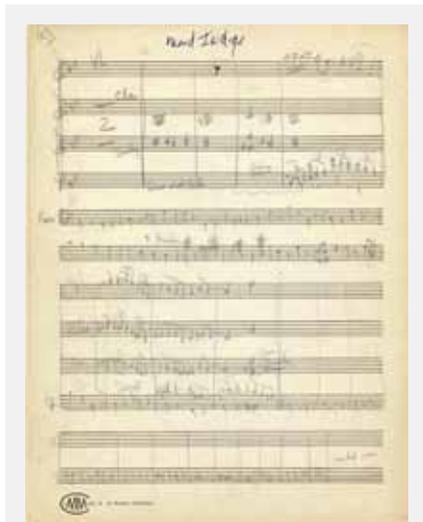
Step Back in Time, page 1 of 2

For more information, visit the National Museum of American History Web site <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/jazz/>.

JAZZ HISTORY

Some people consider jazz as “America’s classical music.” Jazz was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, during the early 1900s when musicians mixed ragtime, marches, blues, and African American musical traditions. At first jazz was mostly for dancing, but it soon became just as enjoyed for listening.

After the first recordings of jazz were made in 1917, the music spread widely and developed quickly. The growth of jazz was led by brilliant musicians such as Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, and Miles Davis, who helped define new styles of jazz, like swing and bebop. At the same time, jazz spread from the United States to many countries, and today jazz can be heard around the globe.



“Mood Indigo” sheet music composed by Barney Bigard and Duke Ellington. **Duke Ellington Collection, National Museum of American History**

JAZZ MUSIC

There is a lot of variety in jazz, but most jazz is very *syncopated*, has a forward-moving energy called “swing,” and uses “bent” or “blue” notes.

You might listen to a dozen different jazz recordings of the same song, but each will sound different. In most jazz performances, individuals play solos, which they *improvise*. Jazz artists—both vocalists and instrumentalists—also like to perform their music in their own personal styles.

Reel History

Step Back in Time, page 2 of 2

DUKE ELLINGTON

Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington (1899–1974) was an expert in exploring his musical imagination. Duke paid attention to new *musical forms* and used the instruments in his band to create his own style of jazz. As you listen to Duke’s music, pay close attention to some of his signature sounds, such as muted trumpets, high clarinet notes, his unique piano playing, and unusual combinations of instruments. Because of his skills in writing song, leading his band, and performing music, some experts think Duke is America's greatest all-around musician.

For more information, visit the *Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn: Jazz Composers* online exhibition at http://americanhistory.si.edu/documentsgallery/exhibitions/ellington_strayhorn_1.html.

Improvise: make up on the spot

Musical forms: the overall plans for pieces of music, such as when verses are repeated in songs

Syncopated: rhythm that includes an accent on a normally weak beat in music



Duke Ellington, a native of Washington, D.C., in the 1930s. **Duke Ellington Collection, National Museum of American History Archives Center.**

Reel History

Directions, page 1 of 2

For kids and adults to follow together.

1. Think about your favorite movie. What are some of your favorite sounds in that movie? How would that movie be different without sounds or music? In the early days of moving pictures (such as movies), sound wasn't included in the same way that it is in today's movies.

2. Watch the Harlem newsreel video at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/v/harlem.html>.

3. Pause to look at the interspersed descriptions. When you read the description, make a guess at what will come next. Then watch the next part of the video and see if it matched your guess.

4. Pause on one of the scenes of the Cotton Club. Imagine what colors you would have seen. Now imagine what sounds you might have heard. Look at the dancing or the way the musicians are moving. Does it seem like a fast or slow song? A happy or sad song? With all those people in the same room, do you think it would be a hot or cold place to be?

Tip

To make this experience even more exciting, consider playing a Duke Ellington song while watching the videos. Here are some suggestions:

- “Caravan,” online at http://americanhistory.si.edu/documentsgallery/exhibitions/ellington_strayhorn_5.html
- “A Train,” online at http://americanhistory.si.edu/documentsgallery/exhibitions/ellington_strayhorn_7.html

Reel History

Directions, page 2 of 2

5. Take another look at the illustrations in *Duke Ellington: The Piano Prince and His Orchestra*. Now that you've seen some of the clothes, cars, and scenes from 1930, look to see if the illustrations look similar to those in the video, or different.

For more activities about jazz and *Duke Ellington: The Piano Prince and His Orchestra*, visit <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/jazz/>.

Reel History

For Teachers

Read the “Parent Guide” and “Directions” sheets for specific instructions.

OBJECTIVES

The students will be better able to:

- Use visual sources to imagine another time and/or place.
- Analyze illustrations in historical stories.

STUDENT PERFORMANCE CRITERIA

- Bases statements on observable evidence from the film.

STANDARDS

NCHS History Standards

K-4 Historical Thinking Standards

2H: Draw upon the visual data presented in photographs, paintings, cartoons, and architectural drawings.

3F: Analyze illustrations in historical stories.

4B: Obtain historical information.

National Standards for Arts Education (K-4)

Music Standards

6: Listening to, analyzing, and describing music

21st-Century Skills

Information, Media, and Technology Skills

- Media Literacy

More information at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/jazz/>.

