

Jumpin' Jazz Concert

Parent Guide

Read the “Directions” sheets for specific instructions.

SUMMARY

In this activity, children and adults will take a trip to explore jazz in their communities, using the suggested discussion questions.

WHY

New experiences and places help children understand how ideas connect with the real world. Learning on field trips can spark curiosity and inspire children to ask better questions about the world around them.

TIME

- 30 minutes or more, plus travel

RECOMMENDED AGE GROUP

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

CHALLENGE WORDS

- **Performance:** a public presentation
- **Venue:** a place where events of a specific type are held

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

- ThinkAbout sheets (*attached*)
- Directions sheet (*attached*)
- Step Back in Time sheets (*attached*)
- Transportation (*possibly*)
- Tickets (*possibly*)

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

Jumpin' Jazz Concert

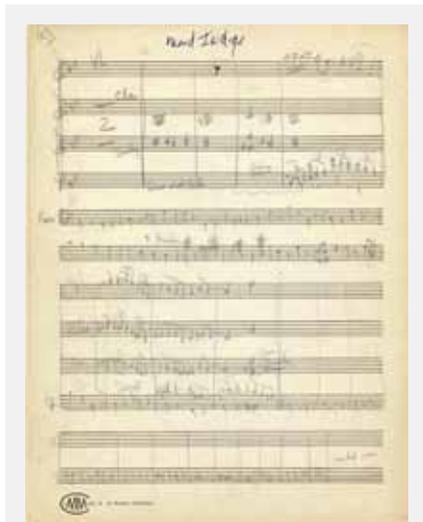
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For more information, visit the National Museum of American History Web site <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/jazz/>.

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.

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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.**

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Directions

For adults and kids to follow together.

1. Decide on your best opportunity to see jazz in your community.
 - a. Some communities observe Jazz Appreciation Month in April. Check this listing from SmithsonianJazz.org to see if your state participates.
www.smithsonianjazz.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=66&Itemid=71
 - b. Do an Internet or GoogleMaps (maps.google.com) search for your state and “jazz.” For example, use Google to search for “jazz” and “Utah.”
 - c. Your local high school or college may also have a jazz band. Search the school’s website for the calendar of events or the music program. If your schedule doesn’t work to attend a concert, try contacting the director of the band and ask if you can watch a rehearsal.

2. Travel to your destination. On your way, listen to jazz music!

3. Use your ThinkAbout sheets to make the most of your jazz experience.

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

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Before Your Trip:

- Check the calendar for the performance space or jazz band you'll be seeing. Check to see if you will need to buy tickets, and if so, whether you should buy them in advance or just walk up that day. Many school and community bands play free concerts. Some may offer visits during dress rehearsals at no charge. See if the performance venue has a website with contact information or a general information phone number in the phone book.
- If the concert has tickets, take a close look. What information is included on the tickets?
- Find out if there will be a break, or intermission, during the performance.

Tip

Some children may find it hard to enjoy a full-length concert. Depending on your child, decide if you want to attend only one part of the concert.

During Your Trip:

- What instruments do you see on stage? Is there one of each instrument or do some musicians play instruments that look the same? Duke Ellington's Orchestra usually had 15 performers. Is that larger or smaller than the band you're watching?

Tip

Jazz bands come in all sizes! Here are some special terms to describe different sizes of bands: 3 people = trio, 4 people = quartet, 5 people = quintet.

- When you look at the stage, which musician is closest to the center? Check out which musicians are to the left and to the right.

Tip

Seating order matters! Placement on the stage helps to blend sounds and helps musicians hear each other when performing.

- Is there a space for members of the audience to dance? If yes, go dance to the music! Also watch other dancers to see what dances they do. Do you like how those dances look?

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- Does the band use a conductor to lead the musicians? If yes, watch what the conductor does to help the musicians work together. If not, try to see if one of the musicians seems to be the leader. Does someone count down at the beginning of a song? Does someone talk to the audience to welcome them or thank them for coming?

Tip

Many times when Duke Ellington's band played, there was no conductor. Duke would lead his musicians from his seat at the piano.

- How many people can sit in the audience in this venue?

Tip

Performers call it a "packed house" when there is an audience member in each seat of the theater.

After the trip:

- Draw a picture of one musician who was especially interesting to you. What instrument did he or she play?
- On the way home, try to sing a little bit of one of your favorite songs.

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

The Kennedy Center also has some outstanding guides for families watching live performances. Consider exploring their recommendations at <http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/students/kc-connections/visiting-the-kc/elementary-school-audiences.aspx> and <http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/families/out-about.aspx>.

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For Teachers

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

OBJECTIVES

The students will be better able to:

- Use observation skills to learn about a place.

STUDENT PERFORMANCE CRITERIA

- Drawing or story reflects accurate details of the experience.

STANDARDS

National Standards for Arts Education (K-4)

Music Standards

- 7: Evaluating music and music performances.

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