

Google Arts & Culture

Learn Together: Black Music Sets the Beat



Using the lesson plan and Google Arts & Culture resources

This lesson plan is designed to support you as you explore Google Arts & Culture stories and exhibits related to the lesson topic. The images you will see here are just a sample of the media—texts, images, audio, and video—available to you on the Google Arts & Culture website. A parent or teacher might be guiding you through the lesson, or you might choose to complete it on your own.

All you need to access the lesson is an internet connection and a web browser. You may want to take notes, whether you do that digitally or with paper and pen.

The lesson plan has an **introduction**, which will describe the topic and provide some background information that will help you understand what you are seeing, hearing, and reading. Then the lesson will take you on a journey from one **Story** or **Exhibit** to another, fill in some details along the way, and pose **questions** that will help you focus on important ideas. Some lesson plans include a **project** related to the lesson topic. All end with a **quiz** and some **ideas for exploring the topic further**.

The lesson plan includes **questions** about the main stories and exhibits, and there is also a **quiz**. You will want to write answers to the questions in a notebook or on a piece of paper. Then you can check all your answers when you've finished the lesson.

Resources on the Google Arts & Culture website include Themes, Stories, Museum Views, items and images.

- ❖ **Themes** bring together stories, exhibits, collections, images, audio, and video files that relate to a topic.
- ❖ In a **Story**, clicking on the arrow on the right side of a slide will move you forward. The arrow on the left side takes you back. Sometimes, clicking on the right arrow will zoom you in on an image. Just keep clicking to keep moving forward. Audio and videos on slides will play automatically. Clicking on an image title will take you to a page with more information about it.
- ❖ In **Museum Views**, you move through a 3D space. Click to move forward. Click, hold, and move the cursor left or right to turn.
- ❖ An **item** will take you to an individual **image**, where you can zoom in and sometimes read more about the artefact.



In this lesson, you will learn about:

- ❖ African Americans who composed, performed, and recorded jazz, blues, and gospel music.
- ❖ how phonographs, movies, and radio spread Black music.
- ❖ how jazz, blues, and gospel music changed over the years.
- ❖ how jazz, blues, and gospel influenced each other and helped create new forms of popular music.

You will:

- ❖ view some stories and exhibits about Black musicians and the music they created.
- ❖ answer some questions about what you have seen and read.

This lesson will take **30–45 minutes** to complete.



Learn Together: Black Music Sets the Beat

In the 1900s, music made by Black Americans got the whole world dancing to its beat. At the start of the century, ragtime was the rage. By the century's end, there was homegrown rap music on every continent. New media made it happen. Black music spread through records, cassette tapes, CDs, movies, and especially radio. Wherever people heard it, toes started tapping.

The exhibits in this lesson explore three forms of Black music—jazz, blues, and gospel—how they influenced each other, and their influences on other popular music. All three musical forms originated in the American south and moved north during the Great Migration, which brought millions of Blacks to northern cities. St. Louis, Kansas City, Chicago, Detroit, New York, and other cities developed their own Black music scenes, each with its distinct musical style.

In every Black community, church music and popular music competed with and influenced each other. Elements of church music, such as close, four-part vocal harmony, worked their way into secular music, while church music took on jazz rhythms and blues notes. Fusions of jazz, blues, and gospel led to new forms of popular music, including rhythm and blues (R & B) and rock n' roll.

As you view the exhibits and stories in this lesson, think about these questions:

- ❖ Who composed, recorded, and performed the music?
- ❖ What did the music sound like, and what made those sounds special?
- ❖ How did the music influence other kinds of popular music?

Portrait of Ella Fitzgerald and Dizzy Gillespie, New York, N.Y., ca. Sept. 1947, William P. Gottlieb, SFJAZZ Center



Bennie Moton Orchestra, Bert, Kansas City Public Library

Kansas City Jazz

In the early 1900s Missouri was famous for ragtime music. Ragtime combined the beat of the polka, a dance from Europe, with syncopation (irregular beats), a feature of African music. The piano was used for percussion as well as melody. In Kansas City, Missouri, musicians combined ragtime piano and banjo with New Orleans-style drums and trumpets and blues notes and lyrics to create a distinctive jazz sound. The music moved to Harlem in New York City and beyond through its best-known artist, Count Basie. Other Kansas City jazz musicians played a part in the invention of rock n' roll.

Click [here](#) to learn about Kansas City jazz.

Then come back to answer these questions:

1. What instruments did Kansas City jazz musicians play?
2. How would you describe the sounds of Kansas City jazz? Listen again to the audio portions of the exhibit as you prepare your answer.
3. How did Kansas City jazz influence other forms of popular music? Base your answer on information from the text, listening to the audio portions of the exhibit, and your own knowledge of pop music history.

To learn about New Orleans as the birthplace of African American music, click [here](#).



Giants of Jazz

Jazz was born in New Orleans but reached the world through New York City. In 1915, the military band of a Black regiment, the Harlem Hellfighters, introduced jazz to Europe. The 1920s is called “the Jazz Age” because the music spread so widely during that decade. “Big band” dance music dominated the 1930s and ‘40s. In the late 1940s a new generation of musicians created bebop, a freer jazz form. This exhibit introduces some great musicians of the big band and bebop eras, and audio clips feature contemporary musicians re-creating timeless jazz compositions.

Click [here](#) to learn about some of the giants of Jazz and to hear their music.

Then come back to answer these questions:

1. What instrument did Louis Armstrong, Dizzie Gillespie, and Miles Davis play?
2. How were the musicians in this exhibit connected to each other? Choose at least two musicians and describe their connection.
3. How are contemporary musicians preserving and transforming jazz? Watch the jazz performances in the exhibit as you prepare your answer.

To learn about bebop and one of its greatest writers and performers, Thelonius Monk, click [here](#).



Sweet Home Chicago: Blues and African American Life

Blues music developed in the South before the Civil War, when “hollers” set the pace for enslaved workers and spirituals lightened the burden of slavery. Blues music became the sound of poverty among White as well as Black rural people. Then the music moved North, where urban Black communities developed their own blues styles. In Chicago, the style included sliding notes on harmonicas and electric guitars. Chicago blues musicians also borrowed from nearby Detroit, a hub for rhythm and blues, a marriage of the blues with gospel music.

Click [here](#) to learn about the Chicago Electric Blues style.

Then come back to answer these questions:

1. What musician established the genre called the Chicago Electric Blues?
2. What are the musical characteristics of the Chicago Electric Blues? Describe the instruments and their sounds.
3. How did the musical styles of Chicago blues musicians differ from each other? Listen again to the audio portions of the exhibit as you prepare your answer.

To learn about the Black music scene in Detroit, click [here](#).



Eastern Virginia Gospel

In many parts of the US, the Black community is deeply rooted in and centered on the church. That's especially true in the South. Southern Blacks bore the brunt of the Jim Crow laws and other injustices of segregation. In response, Black churches developed their own church music styles. Southern gospel music was also a major influence on another Black musical genre, rhythm and blues. In this exhibit, you'll meet a traditional men's quartet, a women's group with a backup band, and a gospel musician who left rhythm and blues to return to the church.

Click [here](#) to learn about southern Black gospel music.

Then come back to answer these questions:

1. What three artists or groups are featured in this online exhibit?
2. How are the musical styles of the Paschall Brothers and the Ingramettes alike and different?
3. This exhibit was sponsored by the Virginia Folklife Program. What qualities of the music place it in the "folklife" category? Support your opinions from personal experience and knowledge as well as from the audio and text.

Many black gospel and R & B groups cut records in Nashville, Tennessee, a hub of the music industry. To learn about Black music in Nashville, click [here](#).

Quiz

Read the questions and write your answer in your notebook or on a piece of paper.

1. What big band era star made Kansas City jazz a national and international sensation?
2. What Kansas City jazz singer influenced early rock n' roll singers, including Chuck Berry and Elvis Presley?
3. Mary Lou Williams was a mentor to the musicians Thelonious Monk, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Tadd Dameron, Bud Powell, and Dizzy Gillespie. What does that mean?
4. What form of jazz was a rebellion against the big band sound?
5. What region of the United States is most closely associated with blues music?
6. What Chicago performer became a well-known scholar and music educator?
7. What were the sources of the songs that early gospel groups sang?
8. How did the sound of gospel music change by the 1970s?

Explore Further

This lesson has given you some vocabulary to talk about Black music in the United States. It has also introduced you to some basic ideas that are relevant to this topic. To learn about other topics in Black history and culture, click [here](#).



It's Your Turn!

In this lesson, you learned about the evolution of various musical forms that are important elements of Black culture in the United States. You saw and read about the works of several musicians who expressed themselves through their musical art. Now it's your turn to express yourself. The project described below requires access to a computer and the internet and software that will allow you to create a slideshow.

Choose one of the musicians you learned about in this lesson or another Black musician whose work you admire. Create a multi-media presentation introducing this artist and his or her work to others.

- ❖ Find images and audio and video clips and organize them in a slideshow to tell the musician's story. Make sure to include some examples of the musician's music!
- ❖ Tie these visual and audio elements together with an oral text that presents important background information and fleshes out details related to the musician's life and work.
- ❖ Present your work to your classmates or family. You may choose to record your presentation for this purpose.

Answers

Kansas City Jazz

1. The pictures show the piano, banjo, guitar, bass, clarinet, saxophone, trumpet, trombone, French horn, tuba, and drums.
2. Answers will vary but might include complex rhythms, carefully restrained drumbeats, riffs, and upbeat tempos.
3. Answers will vary but might note the influence of Big Joe Turner on Jerry Lee Lewis and Elvis Presley.

Giants of Jazz

1. Louis Armstrong, Dizzie Gillespie, and Miles Davis were trumpet players.
2. Answers will vary. Example: Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway performed at the Cotton Club. Mary Lou Williams and Billy Strayhorn composed for Duke Ellington.
3. Answers will vary but should be supported by references to the music videos in the exhibit.

Sweet Home Chicago: Blues and African American Life

1. Muddy Waters established the genre called the Chicago Electric Blues.
2. The Chicago Electric Blues featured the electric guitar, bass, harmonica, piano, and drum kit. The bands had lead singers, usually the guitarists. The music had a heavy beat and contained many sliding notes, both on the harmonica and on the electric guitar.
3. Answers will vary but should be supported by references to the music videos in the exhibit.

Eastern Virginia Gospel

1. The exhibit features the Paschall Brothers, Evangelist Maggie Ingram and the Ingramettes, and Charlie McClendon.
2. Both the Paschall Brothers and the Ingramettes sing church music. The Paschalls are men who sing a *capella*, while the Ingramettes are women who sing with a band. Both groups sing in close harmony. But the Paschalls have a smooth style, close to doo-wap music, while the Ingramettes have an upbeat sound more related to rhythm and blues.
3. Answers will vary but should be supported by details from the audio and text.

Quiz

1. Count Basie made Kansas city jazz a national and international sensation.
2. Big Joe Turner influenced early rock n' roll singers, including Chuck Berry and Elvis Presley.
3. A mentor is a person who has knowledge in a particular area and helps and advises someone who wants to obtain that knowledge.
4. Bebop was a rebellion against the big band sound.
5. The Mississippi Delta region is closely associated with blues music.
6. Ella Jenkins became a scholar and music educator.
7. Gospel groups sang traditional spirituals, hymns, and gospel songs they learned in church.
8. Gospel music added electric instruments and backup bands and choirs. They moved from churches to other performance venues.