

**Musical Mosaic:  
The Journey of Jazz History through Fiction, Poetry, and the Visual Arts**

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**NARRATIVE**

**Jazz in the Middle School Classroom**

The middle school classroom is a space filled with movement, buzzing energy, spontaneity, and creative chaos. To an outsider it appears that there is little happening other than a blur of moving bodies, tapping pencils, and a cacophony of voices and laughter rising in the air. There are bursts of creativity and excitement, followed by lulls of sulking quiet and pensiveness. But underneath this chaos, conflict, and confusion the more scrutinizing viewer recognizes that there *is* something valuable happening – there is a definite rhythm, a certain flow of meaning, and a composed, yet spontaneous effort.

The study of jazz is perfectly suited for this middle school classroom. Middle school students are in the process of composing themselves as human beings, while at the same time creating, performing, and producing as human beings. They *are* improvisation. Rather, they are making themselves up as they go along. Jazz is the perfect background music for the middle school student, since inherent in the form are the elements of improvisation, syncopation, and collective, creative chaos.

My intention in this unit of study built for my sixth grade language arts classroom at Lanier Middle School is to bring jazz music, its history and social context, out of the background and into the foreground, in order to take a closer look at its form, content, and historical significance. I expect that this unit of study *Musical Mosaic: The Journey of Jazz History through Fiction, Poetry, and the Visual Arts* to engage my students in a dialogue that centers around jazz music, but that brings together the words, emotions, visions, and history of various artists and figures connected with its development and history.

**General Teaching Strategy**

***Initial Notes on Jazz, Literature, and the Visual Arts***

Many literary and artistic movements tend to be reactionary. One creative impulse, style, or means of artistic production reacts to and destructs the previous so that the new can exist. It is this overturning and replacement of form and content that creates the movement along a continuum seen as literary and artistic movements. I see jazz music and its development, however, as a sort of a clashing together of forms and movements – a collision. It is this clashing that creates the new, the spontaneous and original, yet still the very whole and complete form of jazz.

According to jazz historian Mark Gridley, “the evolution of jazz cannot accurately be considered a series of ‘reactions,’ as though musicians became collectively angry and then suddenly fought a style by inventing another to oppose it” (3). Like any artistic movement, however, there is *movement*. There is a pushing and progression that can be seen as something of a chronology or timeline. “Tensions, not tendencies, define historical moments,” says Robert Walser in his collection of readings on jazz history, “and avoiding style categories underscores each statement’s place in history” (preface viii). And regardless, of how these tensions, progressions, or movements become defined, they do not, especially historically, resist definition. The movements of jazz, beginning with its roots in African musical culture, to its pulsations through the blues, ragtime, early jazz, the swing era, bebop, cool, and to its manifestations at present, do demonstrate some linear pushing along a trajectory. It is this basic chronology that will be the bedrock of this unit of study.

Rather than compose the unit of study as following an *exclusively* linear or chronological timeline that stops along the way to listen, read, and view artistic compositions, I intend to present the works (and therefore, the unit) more as a whole picture – a picture that when looked at from a distance seems complete and whole, but on closer inspection is really a myriad of singular pieces threaded together by meaning, feelings, ideas, and historical context. It is a picture that is (like jazz itself) made up of pieces, various and intricately distinct, and yet still forming a whole and structured composition – rather, a mosaic.

### ***Musical Mosaic***

The unit of study will weave together several separate, but integrated strands, forms, and pieces: the **jazz artists and jazz movements** (including the blues: *Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Huddie “Leadbelly” Ledbetter*; ragtime: *Scott Joplin, Fats Waller, James P. Johnson*; early jazz or New Orleans jazz: *Jelly Roll Morton, Joe “King” Oliver, Louis Armstrong, Earl Hines*; the swing era: *Fletcher Henderson, Jimmie Lunceford, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Roy Eldridge, Art Tatum, Nat Cole, Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young*; swing era vocalists: *Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald*; bebop: *Charlie Parker, Dexter Gordon, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, Charlie Mingus, Thelonious Monk, Bud Powell, Max Roach, and ending with John Coltrane*); **writers influenced by jazz music** (including the Harlem Renaissance writers: *Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Gwendolyn Bennett, Countee Cullen, Jean Toomer*; the Beat poets; *Ntozake Shange; Walter Dean Myers; Christopher Paul Curtis*) **jazz inspired visual artists** (including *Jacob Lawrence, Edward Burra, Winold Reiss, Archibald J. Motley, Jr., Aaron Douglas, Romare Bearden, Faith Ringold*); as well as **historically significant events** (*slavery and abolition, racial segregation, Jim Crow laws, black migration, the Harlem Renaissance, the Great Depression, WWI and WWII, the Civil Rights Movement*).

This piecing together of disciplines to create a comprehensive picture of the early to mid twentieth century is the concept of the mosaic that is the underlying structure of the unit, and will allow the students to see the disciplines as connected and in context.

### **Beginning the Journey** *A Fictional Parallel*

A background is needed for this mosaic, however. Jumping headfirst into a study of anything prior to their current twelve-year-old experience sends most sixth graders into downshifting, eye rolling, and yawning. There must be a structure or outline that will be the space for my students and I to create a meaningful and relative context for this journey through the music, literature, and art of the early twentieth century. The springboard into this study will be the novel Bud, Not Buddy by Christopher Paul Curtis.

The novel is set in the Depression Era, 1936, and is the story of a ten-year old boy left alone when his mother passes away. Bud is shuffled from foster home to foster home until he runs away determined to find the man he believes to be his father (but who turns out to be his grandfather) – the front man of a jazz band, “Herman E. Calloway and the Dusky Devastators of the Depression!!!!!!” The novel is a perfect impetus for the study of jazz history in a sixth grade classroom for several reasons. Firstly, it is written specifically for the age group of my students, and the main character is very close in age to the sixth grade student. The feelings, actions, and reactions of Bud will, I believe, provide a connection with my students lives in a way that a more “literary” primary selection from the time period would not. It is funny, light-hearted, and written in the language and tone of a young boy. These qualities lend accessibility to larger themes, issues, and sometimes grim historical references.

Secondly, the novel provides an historical context that will aid in the discussion of the societal issues and historical events that were the impulse behind some of the musical movements on which we will focus. Through this historical filter of the novel can be seen many significant events of the jazz age, such as, racial discrimination and segregation, African-American migration, labor organization, and the period of the Great Depression.

Most importantly, however, is what I see as the novels metaphorical parallel of the Black Experience in America. The novel, while humorous and light in tone, is a tightly written account of a young black child’s journey to selfhood against grim and oppressive circumstances. Yet, it is a story of hope, determination, and survival. The novels plot centers on Bud’s literal journey that initiates when his mother dies. His journey, once begun, continues along its path as Bud moves from place to place, episode to episode, never really fitting in to any particular situation until he eventually creates a home with the members of his grandfather’s jazz band.

The novel, in the very first paragraph, sets itself up as a story that has as its underlying rhythms jazz music. As Bud waits in line for breakfast, “one of the caseworkers came in and *tap-tap-tapped* down the line” (Curtis 1). And it will be from this point on, when Bud learns that he is being taken from the only home he knows and into a world of insecurity in which he must survive, that this literary journey or search for self begins. Bud’s literal and figurative journey along a road paved by the music of jazz will be the starting point into our classroom journey through the origins and movements of jazz.

I believe that this journey to selfhood in Bud, Not Buddy perfectly mirrors, or at least, underscores the journey of jazz beginning with the forcing of the African slaves from their homeland to America. In the same way that Bud’s journey begins with the loss of his mother, the seminal beginnings of jazz music can be argued as initiating with the loss of the “motherland” of Africa. When Africans were brought to this country as slaves, they were stripped of everything – their belongings, their families, their dignity, and their homeland. What the African slaves could not be stripped of, however, was their attachment to and reliance on their culture – this they brought with them; and it is this, the carrying on of traditions, rituals, and identity that creates the great collision of thoughts, cultures, and ideals that is the origin of jazz (Seymour 13). This colliding of European musical culture with its elements of high organization, large format, and collective order, with that of African musical culture and its spontaneity, flexibility, and communal aspects, creates the unique impulse within the black American experience that lends to the creation of jazz (Marmalejo).

Metaphorically, the novel parallels this maintaining of traditions and rituals in that Bud sets off for his journey adamantly carrying a suitcase filled with mementos from his past: a blanket, his few articles of clothing, some rocks that belonged to his mother with numbers and letters carved on them, and a blue flyer announcing an engagement featuring a jazz band. This suitcase is Bud’s only connection to his past life with his mother, as well as the stories and pieces of advice that he remembers her telling him, but does not yet clearly understand. He maintains the suitcase throughout his trials and tribulations, clutching it possessively and guarding it against those whom may wish him ill. “I set [the suitcase] on the mattress and untied the twine that held it together,” Bud says. “I did what I do every night before I go to sleep,” he continues, “I checked to make sure everything was there” (Curtis 4). And although it is not exactly clear to Bud when he sets off on his journey the significance or meaning of the items in the suitcase, he does feel with certainty that they are in some way extremely important to who he is and what he is to become.

This extreme consciousness of his need for a connection to his past allows Bud to feel a degree of security and order at a very insecure juncture in his life and in the larger society (the Depression). The blue flyer, especially, is the one possession of Bud’s that contains, what he sees, as the keys to his future. Bud reads and rereads this flyer at frequent intervals. “I liked checking to see if there was anything I hadn’t noticed before.

It was like something was telling me there was a message for me on this flyer but I didn't have the decoder ring to read what it was" (6). Regardless, Bud believes the man in the picture on the flyer to be his father, a member of a jazz band whose players are considered "Masters of the New Jazz" (7). It is this piece of paper that sets Bud "flying" from his current place into a new and entirely different experience. In the same way that the African slaves maintained their sense of culture by strongly holding on to what they could: their traditions, rituals, and music; and then forging these traditions into their current incredibly difficult situation, Bud's possessions and the stories he holds in his head from his mother, eventually become the creative tools he uses to make sense of his life. Instead of hindering him, or keeping him down in some way, those pieces of his past life become what he eventually uses to create a new life and a new sense of who he is.

For instance, the story that Bud remembers his mother telling him regarding his name is both an explanation for the title of the novel, as well as a key element or parallel in the African-American experience of slavery. Bud insists that he be referred to as "Bud, not Buddy" because his mother adamantly maintained that his name was given to him *by her*, and should not be modified in any way or by anyone other than she. She told him, "'Bud is your name and don't you ever let anyone call you anything outside of that either.' She'd tell me, 'Especially don't you ever let anyone call you Buddy, I may have some problems but being stupid isn't one of them, I would've added that *dy* onto the end of your name if I intended for it to be there.'" (41). And while this insistence on names and naming plays an almost comedic role in the novel, it perfectly parallels the practice of stripping African slaves of their possessions, including their names when they were forced to this country.

When Bud is sent by the Home to a foster family, he finds that his new "owners" (for the Amoses are being paid to care for him, therefore, he was, in fact, "sold") want nothing more than to strip him of his dignity and his belongings. Mrs. Amos forces Bud to sleep on plastic sheets, allows her son Todd to verbally abuse and beat him and, fed up with his "show of ingratitude" (14), banishes him to a shed and locks him away. This punishment does not come without Ms. Amos first stripping Bud of his suitcase. She demands, "Oh, no, we shall hold on to his beloved valuables. He is far too attached to those treasures to go anywhere without them" (15-16).

Once again, the novels plot subtleties, in this case removing objects of important ritualistic value, align with the experiences of the Africans in America. Knowing that the African slaves valued drums and drumming as an integral part of their culture and communication, many states enacted antidrum laws, stripping the slaves of an important cultural ritual (Seymour 14). This manipulation and management of African culture is one of the factors that lead to the collision and modification of European and African culture known as the origins or roots of jazz (Gridley 32). For when the slaves lost the drums that were so important to them ritualistically, communicatively, and culturally, they modified or manipulated their situation by using other means such as stomping, clapping, and singing (Seymour 14).

Bud does, in fact, escape from the Amos's imprisonment, retrieves his belongings and finds himself, "on the lam" (Curtis 35). When Bud sets off from the Amos home he runs to, interestingly, the "north side library" (36 my emphasis). Mirroring the exodus of slaves to the north via the Underground Railroad, as well as the later northern migration in the early twentieth century of many blacks seeking opportunity and escaping southern injustices and cruelty, Bud runs to a point north. He goes to the only place where he knows safety exists for him, and searches out the person he believes can give him the knowledge he needs to move along in his journey to find his father – the librarian. Miss Hill, Bud learns however, has moved to Chicago, and therefore, he must move along his path on his own, clutching his belongings, checking them nightly with the sense that within those possessions lie the keys to his future.

Bud's episodes and encounters along the way to meet his father include a chance meeting with a friend from the Home whom he sets off "on the lam;" visits to a breadline where he is aided by a "pretend" family who help him find a place in line; a brief stay in a migratory work camp called "Hooverville;" and receiving help from a man, Lefty Lewis, who is both a black baseball player and a Pullman porter who is attempting to organize a labor union for Pullman porters in Grand Rapids, Michigan. All of Bud's encounters and escapades provide historical references and nuances that will aid in presenting to the students a context for our study of jazz and its social origins.

There are other elements or episodes in the novel that can also be analyzed for their relation to jazz and its forms. I believe that by underscoring the fictional parallels in the novel with these sometimes complex musical elements I will be able to offer the students a bedrock of understanding to our unit topic and its qualities. For instance, the notion of improvisation: the act of composing and performing at the same time. In the novel there is a particularly humorous and endearing way that Bud copes with the uncertainty and instability of his life. Bud keeps a running list of what he calls, "Bud Caldwell's Rules and Things for Having a Funner Life and Making a Better Liar Out of Yourself." One such rule is, "Rules and Things Number 83: If a Adult Tells You Not to Worry, and You Weren't Worried Before, You Better Hurry Up and Start 'Cause You're Already Running Late (42). These rules are Bud's own creations based on what is happening around him at the time; they are his response or reaction to an event or another characters responses to him. They are improvisational in that he makes these rules up as he moves along in his life, and he carries these ideas in his head. They are completely spontaneous, composed, and performed at the same time.

Another such instance in the novel that aligns formally with an element of jazz is the two-way conversation that Bud has with his friend Bugs. The conversation goes like this,

‘There’s supposed to be a train leaving sometime tomorrow. Did you really beat that kid up in the foster home?’

I said, ‘Uh-huh, we kind of had a fight. How long’s it take to get out west?’

Bugs said, ‘Depends on how many trains you got to hop. Was he really two years older than you?’

‘Uh-huh, he was twelve. Is it fun to hop a train?’

‘Some of the time it is, some of the time it’s scary. We heard he was kind of big too, was he?’ (62).

This antiphonal or call-and-response sort of conversation is typical of a pattern of interaction between improvisers, taking the form of a question and answer (Gridley 417). That Bud and Bugs are close friends, and know each other well, makes them capable of carrying on two totally different conversations at once, with neither of them “missing a beat.” By matching or comparing this literal example of call-and-response with a musical one, such as Bessie Smith and Louis Armstrong’s musical conversation on “St. Louis Blues,” or Miles Davis’s “So What,” the students will have a clear understanding of this musical term and element.

Other musical elements appear later in the novel when Bud listens to the Dusky Devastators perform. In fact, the entire passage is Bud’s detailed and descriptive account of hearing the “Masters of the New Jazz” for his first time.

Steady Eddie started snapping his fingers real soft, in time with the piano and the drum...he put his ax in his mouth and blew, but instead of the horn making music it seemed like Steady made it talk. He blew one long, low, rumbly sound and I knew right then, with that one deep, sad moan, what the most beautiful sound in the world was (Curtis 200).

I intend to actually begin presenting a chronology of jazz, its movements, musicians, and music at the point where Bud first encounters Herman E. Calloway. For it is from this point on in the novel, that Bud begins to incorporate all that he has been carrying around with him, in his heart, his head, and in his suitcase, into a new context and new sense of self. It is here where the most interesting parallel to the collision that created the space for jazz exists.

Bud says that the suspicion that Herman E. Calloway is his father started out as a mere seed of an idea. “It’s funny how ideas are,” he says, “in a lot of ways they’re just like seeds. Both of them start real, real small and then . . . woop, zoop, sloop they’ve gone and grown a lot bigger than you ever thought they could” (92). Bud believes, then, that both his father and his mother are providers of a context within which he will find out who he is. “The idea got bigger and stronger,” Bud says, until “it dug its roots in deep and started spreading out” (94). Once again, we find a language that can metaphorically reference, at least the beginnings or “roots” of jazz in America. For jazz

music, too, started out as a mere seed of an idea, an impulse, a deep personal response; and it grew, it developed, it changed, and it spread itself out until it was like Bud's idea about his "father," that "started out as a teeny-weeny seed...and was now a mighty maple" (146).

From this point in the novel, this idea or root stage, I will begin a chronology of jazz history with my students. For once Bud meets Herman E. Calloway and the members of his jazz band, the pieces of his past life, those items that hold such important ritualistic value to Bud, begin to lose some of their mysteriousness. As well, the stories and advice that Bud's mother told him begin to be incorporated into Bud's life in a way that begins to hold a true meaning. He begins to make sense of his past and to use his past in a new context.

Bud learns toward the end of the story that Herman E. Calloway is not his father, but his grandfather. This fact is significant in that Bud's *future* home will be settled deeply in his *past*. Rather than finding a home with a foster family, like the Amoses, Bud's new home comes with deep and significant attachments to his mother's past. The rocks that he has been carrying around, the ones with the numbers and letters carved into them, are "decoded" by Mr. Calloway for Bud; they are gifts given to Bud's mother when she was a girl by her father with the city and dates of his jazz performances. Similarly, Bud learns that the room he has been sleeping in since coming to stay with Mr. Calloway and his band is the childhood room of his mother. Bud has, in fact, come home to his mother, or back to his roots in order to feel at home in the present. As Tony Harlow says regarding jazz musicians (like Art Blakely and Max Roach) who returned to their African roots and to Africa itself in order to recapture their "magical birthright" from "the dark continent [which] is the spiritual homeland and the root of all culture (1), in order to uncover and understand a past that holds such meaning and poignancy.

One of the most epiphanic moments in the novel is when Bud allows the Dusky Devastators to rename him. All of the members of the band have stage names, and after they give Bud his own "ax" to practice on, "Dirty Deed Breed," "Steady Eddie," "The Thug," and "Doo Doo Bug," decide to anoint Bud with his own stage name. Bud realizes that although his mother urged him to never let anyone call him anything other than Bud, having the Dusky Devastators initiate him into the band by renaming him is his motivation to claim a new part of himself. And just like his mother told him when she was alive, "a bud is a flower-to-be. A flower-in-waiting. Waiting for just the right warmth and care to open up" (Curtis 42). The home that Bud finds with his grandfather and his Dusky Devastators of the Depression!!!!!! is just the warmth and care that he needs to "blossom."

Bud ends his journey here. In the music of jazz. In the "storm" and "thunder" that is jazz, "the most beautiful sound in the world" (200, 203). It is significant, I believe that the end of Bud's journey from his mother to his grandfather, from one context to another, or one understanding of self to the next, is also the beginning of his journey as a



jazz musician. His journey is, like Amiri Baraka says of John Coltrane who is discussed later in this unit in the Jazz Timeline section, “actually point and line, note and phrase of the continuum” (37).

### **An Integrated Jazz Timeline** *A Proposed Chronology of Art, Literature, and Music*

The novel will provide a fictional connection or parallel to some of the issues that are held to be the origins of the jazz impulse, and will be our gateway into a discussion of particular historical, musical, and artistic movements. The integrated timeline presented to the students will demonstrate how artistic human expression springs from a myriad of forces and impulses: societal, cultural, historical, as well as, personal and emotional.

As outlined above, I intend to introduce the students to the origins and roots of jazz (the collision of European culture and African culture) via the first few chapters of the novel. At about the point that Bud first meets Herman E. Calloway, I will begin a more directed move along the jazz timeline beginning with a brief look at the blues impulse.

The blues, a mixture of spirituals, field hollers, slave work songs, and European folk music, was a crucial element in jazz development (Seymour 15). This close, but brief analysis of the blues will demonstrate the collision of many musical forms into an entirely new form. The impulse of the blues artist to bend, manipulate, or modify their voice or their instrument will provide a musical connection to the historical and societal ones. Rather, I intend to show the effects of an idealized approach to music being handed to a musician or artist unaccustomed to that approach, and the impetus of that artist to manage the foreign conventions to their own benefit. In addition, the classic blues lyrics will be analyzed and shown to encode messages and contain double entendres, and how those lyrics spring from the same impulse as the field hollers and work songs that the slaves developed as a means of communication in the fields. It will be at this point that the music of Ma Rainey, Huddie “Leadbelly” Ledbetter, Blind Lemon Jefferson, and Bessie Smith will be introduced to the students.

Integrated into this study of the blues will be some of the writings of Langston Hughes from The Dream Keeper and Other Poems, such as, “Dressed Up,” “The Weary Blues,” “Po’ Boy Blues,” “Homesick Blues,” and “Wide River.” Other works to introduce include “Ma Rainey” by Sterling Brown, “Song” by Gwendolyn Bennett, and “The Banjo Player” by Fenton Johnson.

From the blues we will move a bit forward to the idea of collective improvisation, and the movement toward more refined rules and organization – ragtime. Occurring roughly around the late 19<sup>th</sup> mostly early 20<sup>th</sup> century, ragtime “refers to a kind of music that was put together like a military march and had rhythms borrowed from African-American banjo music” (Gridley 35). Focusing mostly on the music of Scott Joplin, Fats

Waller, and James P. Johnson, I intend to introduce the concept of syncopation – the stressing of or accenting of weak beats, a key concept in the development and form of jazz.

From this point on the timeline, we will take a look at a concurrent movement in jazz history known as early jazz or New Orleans style jazz. I will use the music of Louis Armstrong (relying heavily on an analysis of “West End Blues,” especially the opening solo) to focus on and demonstrate the transition from ragtime’s collective improvisational form to the early jazz swing feeling and heavier reliance on the solo performer. Armstrong’s sense of rhythmic displacement or pushing and playing on the sense of time created a musical tension, while at the same time freeing and releasing jazz from ragtime’s less relaxed compositions. This freeing is what allowed the black artist to become more important, more singular, more prominent (Marmalejo). Other musicians will be presented here: Earl Hines, Jelly Roll Morton, Joe “King” Oliver, and others. But I do intend to showcase the work of Louis Armstrong during this segment of the timeline, because of his incredible influence on the development of jazz from that point on. It will also be at this point in the unit that the concept of improvisation will be focused on more fully.

Integrated into this piece of the “musical mosaic” will be a look at Black migration to the north during the early twentieth century and how this migration affected the culture and artistic production of blacks in America. I will use expository texts, such as Bound for the Promised Land by Michael L. Cooper, as well as the picture story books The Great Migration by Jacob Lawrence and Harlem by Walter Dean Myers. The writers of the Harlem Renaissance that I will present here include, once again, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, James Weldon Johnson, Arna Bontemps, and Countee Cullen. I will also read aloud excerpts from Marcus Garvey’s “Africa for the Africans,” James Weldon Johnson’s “Black Manhattan,” W.E.B. Du Bois’s “Criteria of Negro Art,” and Langston Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain.” Paintings and sculptures by visual artists include, Archibald J. Motley, Jr.’s “Blues,” (1929), “Cocktails,” (1926), “Jockey Club,” (1929). We will even take brief look at the filmwork of Oscar Micheaux by showing audition scenes from his 1938 film, “Swing.”

From here we will move into the swing era of the 30’s and 40’s. This will probably be of interest to the students in that the novel Bud, Not Buddy is set during this era. Here we will focus on the music of Fletcher Henderson, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Nat Cole, Roy Eldridge, Coleman Hawkins, as well as the vocalists Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald. Of interest will be the move to a less improvisational, more structured or organizational sense of musical styling, the increase of written arrangements, and a higher degree of instrument proficiency. Also presented to the students will be the fact that jazz during the swing era was ingrained into the popular American culture in a way that it had not been before (Gridley 90). This will be threaded back into the historical context of the Curtis novel, in that the Depression era was the historical and social context of swing era music.

Weaving into the fabric of this period will be a historical look at the Depression Era. I intend to show “The Grapes of Wrath” (1940) for an account of a white families experience of the Depression, as a sort of counterpoint to Bud’s story. Additionally, I will show photographs by James Van Der Zee, Walker Evans, and Dorothea Lange.

Moving along the trajectory of jazz progression through history our next study will be the era known as bebop. I intend to show the “swing” away from the highly popular and public aspects of the swing or big band era, to a more elitist or underground existence of modern jazz. Although Gridley states that “rather than being a reaction *against* swing styles, modern jazz developed smoothly *from* swing styles” (147), there is some degree of questioning, rebelling against, and overturning of conventions inherent in the modern jazz or bebop movements. Unlike the swing era, the music of the bebop musicians, including Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, and Charlie Mingus, was something of “a musical revolt – with social dimensions” (Creative Fire 78). This rebelliousness or revolution had much to do with the musicians’ unwillingness to accept their role as pure entertainer. These musicians, instead, demanded to be placed in the role as artist.

Along with this revolution came a reliance, once again, on improvisation, as well as a degree of experimentation and non-conforming to previous structures or thoughts on jazz composition. The bebop musicians unresolved chord progressions, complex melodies and harmonies, and agitated and jumpy qualities (Gridley 148) can be paralleled in the experimental literature of the Beat poets, as well as the work of visual artists like Jackson Pollock, Willem De Kooning, or Mark Rothko (to name a few) who worked by sort of abstracting or experimenting with the viewers’ expectations of representation.

In order to bring a closure to the jazz chronology I intend to use the music of John Coltrane as the final focal point on the timeline. By using Coltrane as the finale to the unit I hope to leave the students with an understanding as to where jazz has been, where it has lead, and where it could possible be taken in the future.

As Gridley states on Coltrane, “in the final forty years of the twentieth century, few musicians or composers affected jazz as much as . . . John Coltrane” (262). For Coltrane drew on past styles and movements extensively, while at the same time pushing himself and his instrument in a way that “expanded the repertory of techniques to which other saxophonists aspired” (263). In other words, Coltrane swept the range jazz history from its roots to the present, and then carried it to the farthest point on the continuum. Like writer/poet Amiri Baraka says of Coltrane, he was “the starter of one thing yet the anchor of something before” (37).

Coltrane’s sweeping range of previous movements and quest for new movements and experimentation with his instrument and within himself lend to a perfect ending point for the chronology and the unit. Since his music is arguably both an ending and a

beginning in jazz history the students will be given closure while at the same time offered the opportunity to initiate new questions about the topic of jazz music and its history/present/future. As Amiri Baraka says in his poem “I Love Music” – “THE MUSIC / can be / all of it meaning, essence revelation, / everything together, wailing in unison a terrible / wholeness.”

This wholeness, with everything wailing together in a perfect, terrible unison is the picture that I hope the students envision after the presentation of this unit on jazz history and its magnificent, tense, oppressive, and wonderful journey. I would love to end the unit having the students love jazz music as much as I do, but I will settle for an understanding and appreciation, and well-planned and quality projects. I hope to lead the students in a final discussion regarding the development of musical styles in general. If jazz came from such a colorful and complicated past, born from societal issues and historical references, what about rock-n-roll? What about hip-hop music? What about alternative music? I hope that their own questions will reveal to them the intricate and complex scenery that is the development of artistic expression.

## **LESSON PLANS**

### **Visual Response**

#### *Enacting the Jazz Schema*

This introductory lesson is a way to enact any prior knowledge that the students already have regarding jazz. All of my students have had contact with the music throughout the year, for it is the background music played during their writer’s notebook time that is a daily writing activity. Some students have a greater experience of the music from parents, siblings, or because they take band in school.

If students are to have an interactive experience with the unit and its contents, however, there needs to be some “schema activation,” or “consciously calling to mind what [the students] know about the topic” (Manzo 22). Rather, my introductory lesson will simply be a way to help the students begin constructing a knowledge or appreciation of jazz from what they already know and appreciate about the topic.

*The students will need:*

4x6 white index card  
markers, crayons, colored pencils  
mixed media materials (such as magazines, cardboard, buttons, photographs, or any recycled material)

The students will be given the index card and have the materials at their disposable. The only instructions given will be that the students will be creating a visual

response or representation of their thoughts on a given prompt. I will instruct the students that they can create whatever they choose as long as it fits onto the surface of their index card. I will then hold up a sign that simply says the word “Jazz.” The students will then begin creating and constructing their visual representation of their initial gut response to that prompt.

Students will present these visuals to the whole group when finished, describing the contents of their visual response, why they chose the materials that they did, and describing the scene they depicted on their index card. Students will share their thoughts on what jazz means to them, as well as their thoughts on form, content, and meaning of jazz music. I will script these verbal responses as the students share. These scripted comments, as well as the visual responses will be used to create a class bulletin board that will remain up in the classroom for the length of the unit.

Assessment of this activity will be solely a participation and completion grade. The activity is performed only to engage the students in an initial discourse around jazz, and to function as a “learning net” that will help to “recognize, evaluate, categorize, and retain new information” that they will be introduced to throughout the course of the unit of study (22-23).

## **The Jazz Songbook**

### *Collecting the Classroom Chaos*

The students will need a way of organizing and maintaining all of the information presented in class. With all of the musicians, musical compositions, visuals, personal responses, activity sheets, vocabulary, and notes that the students will be collecting there needs to be a structure or framework for them to organize all of the pieces. The Jazz Songbook is a glorified class folder for the students to maintain the individual pieces of the unit.

*Students will need:*

A folder with brads for notebook paper  
Notebook paper  
Construction paper for dividers

Students will compile their folders with the following sections: Jazz Notes, Musicians and Music, Personal Responses, Jazz Vocabulary, Activities.

The Jazz Notes section will be where all class notes will be recorded. These notes will contain any of the historical references presented, specific information and facts on jazz, and connections with the novel.

The Musicians and Music section will be a log of all of the musicians and musical compositions we listen to in class, along with the date it was recorded, and any other factual information about the recording. Brief biographical notes on musicians, if given, will also be recorded here. This will also be the section where students can chronologically record the movements of jazz that we will cover.

The Personal Responses section will be a section for the students to creatively respond to any of the music, art, or literature presented in class. Some responses will take the form of creative writing, and others may take the form of visual responses and representations, such as the one described in the first lesson plan – A Visual Response to Jazz.

The Jazz Vocabulary section will simply be a list of terms relating to our study of jazz. These terms will include:

- Beat
- Accent
- Rhythm
- Tempo
- Melody
- Harmony
- Pitch
- Form
- Meter
- Measure
- Theme and variations
- Syncopation
- Polyphony
- Blue notes
- Pitch bending
- Improvisation
- Collective improvisation
- Call and response
- Arrangement
- Swing

The Activities section of the Jazz Songbook is simply a place for the students to maintain and organize any handouts or copies of materials that I give to them.

While the Jazz Songbook is a tool for the students to use that will aid them tremendously in the process of their final project, it will also be assessed as final piece of student work. Organization, quality, content, and completion of activities will all be assessed.

## **The Musical Mosaic**

### ***A Final, Culminating Project***

In keeping with the idea of the mosaic presented earlier in the unit, the students will produce a final, culminating project that they will work on individually – a musical mosaic. This mosaic will be a creative piece of visual art that will represent all of the integrated areas or disciplines covered in the unit: literature, visual arts, and music.

This unit on jazz history directly follows two units that will aid them in the completion of this musical mosaic. One on visual and media literacy, in which students studied the principles of communication with a focus on visual communication, or “reading” images for the messages they contain. And a unit in which students read, analyzed, and then wrote various closed forms of poetry. The mosaic will pull strands from both of these studies in that the final musical mosaic that the students produce will be both visual and literary, appropriated and original, and constructed of pieces of various disciplines and forms of art.

#### *Students will need:*

Various research materials (these will be available in the classroom – see student bibliography)  
16x20 piece of cardboard, foam core, or poster board  
Photocopies, scanned images, or student generated creative drawings, paintings, etc.  
Paints, markers, colored pencils, oil pastels, etc.

#### *The students will choose one of each of the following:*

- a jazz musician and a piece of music by that artist (i.e., a student may choose “Bemsha Swing” by Thelonius Monk, or “West End Blues” by Louis Armstrong);
- a writer and a piece of literature, (i.e., Langston Hughes’ “Jazzonia”); and
- a visual artist and a work (i.e., Archibald J. Motley Jr.’s “Blues”)

#### *The student will then produce:*

- a brief biography of the chosen musician, writer, and artist;
- a piece of creative writing or poem by the student inspired by the music, writing, or art of one of the student’s “jazz figures”;

- a piece of visual art that will be the mosaic itself – the mosaic will be composed of the above pieces, and will include visual images (black and white, color-copies, or scanned and printed images, or renderings) of their jazz figures – the students will be creating the piece of artwork in the classroom using materials provided by me, as well as materials needed and purchased by the students.

This final piece of work will be displayed in the school in an exhibit designed by the students. The culminating project, like all major projects in my classroom, will be peer assessed using a grading rubric designed by the students with final approval of the assessment given by me.



## **WORKS CITED**

Curtis, Christopher Paul. Bud, Not Buddy. Delacorte Press, 1999.

Baraka, Amiri. "The Coltrane Legacy" Linear Notes for The Last Giant: The John Coltrane Anthology. Rhino Records, Inc., 1993

Gridley, Mark. Jazz Styles: History and Analysis. 7<sup>th</sup> Ed. Prentice-Hall, Inc.: New Jersey, 2000.

Harlow, Tony. Liner Notes from AfroBlue. Blue Note Records a Division of Capitol Records, 1999.

Manzo, Anthony V. and Manzo, Ula. Content Area Literacy: Interactive Teaching for Active Learning. 2nd Ed. Prentice-Hall, Inc.: New Jersey, 1997.

Marmalejo, Noe, seminar lectures, "Jazz History: The Art and Its Social Roots," 2000.

Seymour, Gene. Jazz: The Great American Art. New York: Franklin Watts, 1995.

Walser, Robert. Keeping Time: Readings in Jazz History. Ed. Robert Walser. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

## **ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

### **Readings for the Teacher**

Curits, Christopher Paul. Bud, Not Buddy. New York: Delacourte Press, 1999.

This is the novel that will be the primary text that I plan to use as the impetus to our study of jazz history.

Gridley, Mark C. Jazz Styles: History and Analysis. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2000.

This text is a comprehensive chronological survey of the history of jazz.

The Harlem Renaissance Portable Reader. Ed. David Levering Lewis. New York: Penguin Books, 1994.

This is the text that I will use to inform my background knowledge of the literature of the Harlem Renaissance and the Jazz Age. Most of the poetry that I use in the classroom will come from this collection.

Keeping Time: Readings in Jazz History. Ed. Robert Walser. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

This is a collection of contemporary journalism, reviews, program notes, memoirs, interviews and other sources that covers the history of jazz over a 100 year period.

Rhapsodies in Black: Art of the Harlem Renaissance. Ed. Richard J. Powell and David A. Bailey. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

This is an exhibition catalogue of paintings, sculpture, and photography, as well as commentary, from an exhibition that opened at the Hayward Gallery in London in 1997. The retrospective “explores the Harlem Renaissance not as a phenomenon confined to a few square miles of Manhattan, but as an historical moment of global significance.” I intend to use this source for its reproductions, and for its textual commentaries on the visual arts of the Harlem Renaissance.

## **ANNOTATED STUDENT BIBLIOGRAPHY**

### **Readings for the Students**

In addition to the novel that we will be reading in class the following list is an initial list of texts that the students will have access to in the classroom. Some of the books will be used during instruction, others will be on hand for student research.

Bryan, Ashley. Ashley Bryan’s ABC of African American Poetry. New York: Atheneum Books, 1997.

A poem and painting for each letter of the alphabet describes an aspect of the black experience. Poets included in the collection are Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, Rita Dove, Gwendolyn Brooks, Amiri Baraka, and others.

Collier, James Lincoln. Louis Armstrong: An American Success Story. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1985.

A biography of Louis Armstrong written for young adults.

Hughes, Langston. The Dream Keeper and Other Poems. Ill. by Brian Pinkney. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1994.

A selection of Hughes poems including, “The Weary Blues,” “Minstrel Man,” “Negro Dancers,” “Bound No’th Blues,” and other poems inspired by the blues and jazz.

Lawrence, Jacob. The Great Migration: An American Story. New York: The Museum Of Modern Art and Harper Collins Publishers, 1993.

The book contains a series of paintings that chronicle the journey of African Americans during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when many blacks left the rural South for better jobs and opportunities in the North. The book also contains a poem “Migration” by Walter Dean Myers that is a celebration of the paintings.

Marsalis, Wynton. Marsalis on Music. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995.

This is the companion book to the PBS television series by Wynton Marsalis. The book is an introduction to both classical music and jazz; it is illustrated with paintings by the artist Romare Bearden.

Monceaux, Morgan. Jazz: My Music, My People. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994.

Stories of the people who made jazz and told with paintings, personal recollections, and biographies.

Myers, Walter Dean. Harlem. Illustrated by Christopher Myers. New York: Scholastic Press, 1997.

A poem about the music, literature, and history of Harlem. The poet’s son Christopher complements the words with collage art that connects visuals to the poem.

Osofsky, Audrey. Free to Dream: The Making of a Poet. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books, 1996.

Photographs throughout the book give a visual, as well as biographical introduction to the Harlem poet.

Seymour, Gene. Jazz: The Great American Art. New York: Franklin Watts, 1995.

A history of jazz, from its roots in blues, ragtime, and swing to contemporary manifestations. It covers all of the most significant names in jazz history along with photos of the artists. Written for a young adult audience.

Raschka, Chris. Charlie Parker played be bop. New York: Orchard Books, 1992.

A visually stimulating introduction to the jazz saxophonist. Written for young children, the illustrations and rhythm of the words are a good introduction into the techniques of improvisation and swing.

– Mysterious Thelonious. New York: Orchard Books, 1997.

In this picture book the author/illustrator matches the tones of the chromatic scale to the values of the color wheel in presenting a portrait of the music of Thelonious Monk's "Misterioso."

Shange, Ntozake. i live in music. Paintings by Romare Bearden. Singapore: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1994.

Shange's poem is a tribute to the language of music and it is paired with paintings by Romare Bearden.

## **ANNOTATED DISCOGRAPHY**

### **Music for Their Ears**

All of the musical selections for the unit of study will come from the following compact disc recordings.

The Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz. Vols. 1-5. Smithsonian Institution, 1997. Sony Music Entertainment Inc., 1987.

The majority of the selections will come from this comprehensive collection of jazz recordings, including: Bessie Smith, Jelly Roll Morton, Joe King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, Fletcher Henderson, Art Tatum, Duke Ellington, etc.

Night on the Delta: Acoustic Blues. Sony Music Entertainment Inc., 1999.

I will use a few selections from this cd, such as, Leadbelly's "Good Morning Blues," Robert Johnson's "When You Got a Good Friend," and Son House's "Death Letter."

Louis Armstrong Volume IV: Louis Armstrong and Earl Hines. CBS Records, Inc., 1989.

A good selection for early Armstrong recordings with the Hot Fives and Hot Sevens.

Billie Holiday: Billie's Best. Verve a Division of PolyGram Records, Inc., 1992.

All recordings on this cd from The Complete Billie Holiday on Verve: 1945-1959.

Ultimate Charlie Parker. Verve Records a Division of PolyGram Records, Inc., 1999.

Recordings from 1948-1952 and selected by Jackie McLean.

Charlie Parker Jazz at the Philharmonic 1949. Clef Records a Division of Polygram Records, Inc., 1993.

Bird and Diz. Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie with Thelonious Monk, Curly Russell, and Buddy Rich. Clef Records a Division of PolyGram Records, 1997.

Recorded in June of 1950 this is the legendary final record date that Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker made together.

The Essence of Thelonious Monk. Sony Music Entertainment, Inc., 1991.

Recordings from the 60's include, "Round Midnight," "Bemsha Swing," and "Ruby, My Dear."

Kind of Blue. Miles Davis. Columbia Records, 1997.

Blue Train. John Coltrane. Blue Note Records, 1997.

Live at the Village Vanguard the Master Takes. John Coltrane. Impulse, MCA Records, Inc., 1997.

A Love Supreme. John Coltrane. Impulse, MCA Records, Inc., 1995.

The Last Giant: The John Coltrane Anthology. Rhino Records, Inc. 1993.

I will choose selections from the above cd's to represent the range of Coltrane.

AfroBlue. Blue Note Records a Division of Capitol Records, Inc., 1999.

Recordings by jazz musicians such as Art Blakely and Jackie McLean who explored the roots and rhythms of jazz in African musical culture, especially drumming.