

An Introduction to Jazz

Grade 11 | Lesson Plan 2: Elements of Jazz

Adapted from Jazz in America: The National Jazz Curriculum

TOPICS:

1. Improvisation
2. Rhythm and general swing feel
3. Sounds and instruments associated with Jazz
4. Harmony
5. Form

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

The student will:

1. gain a fundamental understanding of Jazz's primary elements
 - a. improvisation
 - b. rhythm and general swing feel
 - c. sounds and instruments associated with Jazz
 - d. harmony
 - e. form
2. learn the basic definition of several terms associated with Jazz
 - a. arrangement
 - b. chorus
 - c. comp; comping
 - d. embouchure
 - e. ending ("taking it out")
 - f. form
 - g. harmony
 - h. head
 - i. improvisation
 - j. intro
 - k. Jam session
 - l. out head
 - m. rhythm
 - n. swing (in the general sense¹)
 - o. syncopation
 - p. tempo
 - q. vamp
3. learn the definition of general words
 - a. autonomy
 - b. cognitive; cognitively
 - c. extant
4. listen to *Song for My Father*

MATERIALS

1. Computer with internet connection

¹ The term *swing* has a number of meanings and connotations, many of which require a musical background and others which are almost indefinable. For purposes of this lesson, only swing in the general sense will be discussed. As used here, the term should not be confused with its use as a label for the era of Jazz in the 1930s-mid 1940s, i.e., the Swing Era.

2. Speaker system

Note: This lesson plan includes prompts to play selections from a variety of jazz recordings. Many of the suggested recordings can be found on the Instrumental History of Jazz, which is available as a YouTube playlist, as well as a variety of streaming and/or download outlets including iTunes, Apple Music and Spotify.

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES:

The instructor will:

1. discuss the primary musical elements of Jazz
 - a. improvisation
 - b. rhythm and general swing feel
 - c. sounds and instruments associated with Jazz
 - d. harmony
 - e. form
2. play *Song for My Father*, pointing out various elements of Jazz

Content Outline

I. Improvisation - perhaps Jazz's most essential ingredient

- A. Improvisation** is spontaneous composition, that is, each musician "makes up" what he/she is playing as he/she is playing it (easier said than done)
- B. Jazz improvisation** is very similar to regular conversation (see Jazz Improvisation/ Conversation analogy sheet)
- C. in order to improvise**, a musician needs to:
1. be able to technically play his/her instrument well
 2. have an understanding of music theory (the way notes and chords go together)
 3. have the ability to play by ear (i.e., the ability to play the music one "hears" in his/her head without reading music)²
 4. have a musical vocabulary covering a wide variety of styles (i.e., be familiar with various styles of Jazz, as well as blues, rock, pop, classical, etc.)

II. Rhythm

A. Basic definition

1. according to the American Heritage Dictionary, rhythm is a regular pattern formed by a series of notes of differing duration and stress
2. that part of the music which concerns how long or short each note is played
3. the beat of the music
4. that part of the music that makes the listener want to tap his/her foot
5. the "feel" of a tune (song); a tune's "groove" (i.e., rock, funk, swing, salsa, etc.)

- B. Jazz rhythms** can range from simple to extremely complex; however, underlying even the most complex rhythms performed by each individual musician in a Jazz group is an underlying pulse (the beat) - that which makes the listener able to tap his/her foot with the music³

C. Tempo: the speed of the pulse (beat)

1. the speed at which the listener (or the player) taps his/her foot is the tempo of that particular version of a tune
2. tempos in Jazz range from very slow (ballads) to extremely fast (tunes that are "burning")

D. Syncopation

1. the accenting of beats that are normally not accented
2. stressing the notes that are on the up-beat (i.e., when one's foot is in the air - or up position - when tapping normally with the beat of the music)

E. Swing

1. a difficult-to-define rhythmic concept
2. for the musician, the definition of swing, among other complexities, is a manner of playing a steady stream of notes in a long-short-long-short pattern
3. for the listener (as well as the player), swing refers to the music's buoyancy, rhythmic lilt, liveliness, and cohesiveness
4. if a Jazz performance has constant tempo (not slowing down or speeding up), rhythmically cohesive group playing, syncopation, and an upbeat feeling, it's swinging

- F. Through listening** to Jazz recordings (as well as live Jazz), practice, and performance, Jazz musicians internalize the rhythmic element so completely that it is as natural for them as breathing

² As Jazz is usually a combination of partly planned (i.e., written) and partly spontaneous (i.e., improvised) music, most Jazz musicians have the ability to read music and play by ear.

³ While most Jazz utilizes a steady pulse (beat), certain styles of Jazz are played "freely" with no steady beat.

- G. The often subtle** and varied use of a multitude of simple and complex rhythms, all interwoven extemporaneously into one cohesive sound, is, perhaps more than any other element, what makes Jazz, Jazz

III. Sounds and instruments associated with Jazz

- A. Jazz musicians** play their instruments utilizing the complete gamut of tone colors (tonal quality) that their instruments will allow
- B. Unlike classical players** who usually strive for a clear, "pure" tone, Jazz players strive for a tone that is generally more "vocal" in nature, i.e., Jazz musicians will bend pitches, "growl," "whine," play "raunchy," "dark," "light," "airy," "raspy," "bluesy," "throaty," "nasally" (anything the human voice can do to express emotion and then some) in addition to playing clearly
- C. Today,** Jazz can be (and is) played on virtually any instrument, including the human voice; the most common instruments associated with Jazz (in order of basic precedence) are:
1. saxophone
 2. trumpet
 3. piano, bass, and drums (known as the rhythm section)
 4. guitar
 5. clarinet
 6. trombone
 7. flute
- D. Each instrument** has its own general tone color (e.g., a saxophone sounds different from a trumpet, guitar, flute, piano, etc.) and each musician has his/her own particular sound on that instrument
1. Although a saxophone still sounds like a saxophone no matter who's playing it, most Jazz musicians and aficionados can distinguish one saxophonist from another by his/her tone alone
 - a. in the same way, we can distinguish one human voice from another
 - b. even if we hear someone speak whom we haven't talked to in months, we usually can distinguish who it is even after just one "hello" on the phone: that's how distinctive one particular voice can be; that's how distinctive one saxophonist's sound can be
 2. A Jazz musician's particular sound is part of his/her signature, part of what distinguishes him/her from another
 3. What attracts the listener is not just what a particular Jazz musician plays (i.e., how he/she improvises), it's also the way he/she plays (i.e., his/her particular sound)

IV. Harmony

- A. Two or more notes** played at the same time constitutes harmony; also known as a chord (also known as a "change" among Jazz musicians)
- B. Jazz chords** are usually four to seven notes played simultaneously
- C. Each chord** and each chord voicing (the way the notes are arranged) depict a different emotion, e.g., happy, sad, angry, hopeful, etc. (most can't be labeled as the emotion they convey is beyond wording and different for every listener; "music is in the ears of the beholder")
- D. A series of chords** (known as a chord progression or simply the "changes") accompanies the composed melodies of and improvisation on tunes (songs)
1. although there are some chord progressions that are used over and over for several different tunes, most tunes have their own distinctive chord progression

2. Jazz musicians (primarily pianists and guitarists since they are the ones who play chords) have the autonomy to voice chords (put the notes in a particular order from bottom to top) the way they want, add notes to chords, and substitute other chords for the original ones, all in order to make the music "hipper," i.e., more up to date, better sounding, more "happening," and more personal

E. Comping

1. definition: the rhythmically syncopated playing of chords
2. pianists and guitarists comp the chords
3. the term comping comes from two words: to accompany and to compliment; that is precisely what pianists and guitarists do: they accompany and compliment the soloists⁴

V. Form

A. Most Jazz tunes utilize a recurring chord progression that serves as the structure of the tune; the way in which the sections of the progression are grouped determines the form of the tune

B. Form can be considered a tune's "musical blueprint," allowing each musician (and educated listener) to keep his/her place in the structure

C. Each different section of a chord progression is assigned a different letter

1. For example: if a tune is 24 measures long and is divided into three eight-measure sections with the first two sections containing a set of identical chords and the last section containing a set of different chords, the form is AAB (see Horace Silver's *Song for My Father* on next page)

*Song for My Father*⁵

Form: A A B (24-Bar Tune)

A:	F-		Eb7		Db7	C7sus	F-		
A:	F-		Eb7		Db7	C7sus	F-		
B:	Eb7		F-	Eb7	Db7	C7sus	F-		

2. For example: if a tune is 32 measures long and is divided into four eight-measure sections with the first two sections containing a set of identical chords, third section a different set of chords, and the last section the same as the first, the form is AABA (see *Take the A Train* below)

Take the A Train

Form: A A B A (32-Bar Tune)

A:	C		D7#5		D-	G7	C	D- G7
A:	C		D7#5		D-	G7	C	D- G7
B:	F				D7		D-	G7
A:	C		D7#5		D-	G7	C	D- G7

D. In a Jazz performance, the form of a tune, i.e., all the chords of the tune in a predetermined sequence (such as AAB, AABA, ABAC, etc.) will be repeated over and over; each time through is called a chorus

⁴ Guitarists and pianists, when it is their turn, improvise solos as well; when soloing, pianists usually comp chords with their left hand, accompanying their own right hand solos.

⁵ Each chord symbol (e.g., F-, Eb7, etc.) indicates to all the performers what chord the pianist and/or guitarist is playing (Jazz musicians know what notes these symbols represent); each blank measure indicates that the previous chord is still being played (for example, in *Song for My Father*, F- is played for two measures, Eb7 for two measures, Db7 for one measure, C7sus for one measure, etc.); each measure represents the time length of four steady taps of the foot at whatever tempo the band is playing.

E. For each chorus, something different happens; the most common sequence is:

1. First chorus: the melody instruments (e.g., the horns) play the head, that is, the composed melody of the song⁶
2. Middle choruses (undetermined number): each musician in turn improvises a solo using the form as his/her guide, knowing the chord progression of each section (the chords provide the impetus for what notes can be played by the improviser); each soloist can improvise for as many choruses as he/she desires
3. Last chorus: the head again (called the "out" head as the musicians are taking the tune "out," that is, ending the tune)

F. Often before the first chorus (the head), there is an introduction; often after the last chorus (the out head), there is an ending

G. The most common forms found in Jazz include AABA, ABAC, 16-Bar Tune, and 12-Bar Blues (see Common Forms sheet)

H. Who does what during each chorus is called the arrangement

1. arrangements can be determined prior to the performance and are often written
2. generally speaking, the larger the ensemble, the more need to have written arrangements⁷
 - a. Arrangements are written and published for Jazz Bands of all sizes and levels from elementary school to professional
 - b. Most are written for the standard "big band" instrumentation of five saxes, four trumpets, four trombones, and four "rhythm," i.e., piano, bass, guitar,⁸ and drums (incidentally, most high school Jazz Bands utilize this instrumentation); more to come on Big Band music in lesson #4 when discussing the swing era
3. Arrangements can be determined by a brief "talk over" prior to a performance or even on the spur of the moment (this is called a head arrangement)
 - a. Usually occurs in the small group (quintet or smaller) setting
 - b. When occurring at an informal Jam session, who does what when is directed by common practice intuition, and visual cues (e.g., head nods, looks, etc.)

I. Listen to *Song for My Father* by Horace Silver (Form: AAB); see and listen to the arrangement (see *Song for My Father* arrangement sheet on the next page)

⁶ Sometimes, not often, the head will be repeated for the second chorus; this is usually up to the players involved.

⁷ Generally speaking, the larger the ensemble, the more written notes (melodies, harmony parts, background accompaniment parts, etc.), the less room for improvisation.

⁸ In a Big Band, guitar is considered part of the rhythm section.

Song for My Father

Form: **A A B**

- a. CD counter: 0:01-0:08 **introduction** vamp for four measures
- b. CD counter: 0:09-0:53 **chorus 1 (AAB):** head (original written melody played by tenor sax and trumpet)
- 1. first A CD counter: 0:09-0:23
 - 2. second A CD counter: 0:24-0:38
 - 3. B CD counter: 0:39-0:53
- c. CD counter: 0:54-1:39 **chorus 2 (AAB):** head repeated
- 1. first A CD counter: 0:54-1:09
 - 2. second A CD counter: 1:10-1:24
 - 3. B CD counter: 1:25-1:39
- d. CD counter: 1:40-2:25 **chorus 3 (AAB):** piano solo (Horace Silver)
- 1. first A CD counter: 1:40-1:54
 - 2. second A CD counter: 1:55-2:10
 - 3. B CD counter: 2:11-2:25
- e. CD counter: 2:26-3:10 **chorus 4 (AAB):** piano solo cont.
- 1. first A CD counter: 2:26-2:40
 - 2. second A CD counter: 2:41-2:55
 - 3. B CD counter: 2:56-3:10
- f. CD counter: 3:11-3:55 **chorus 5 (AAB):** piano solo cont.
- 1. first A CD counter: 3:11-3:25
 - 2. second A CD counter: 3:26-3:40
 - 3. B CD counter: 3:41-3:55
- g. CD counter: 3:56-4:41 **chorus 6 (AAB):** tenor saxophone solo (Joe Henderson)
- 1. first A CD counter: 3:56-4:10
 - 2. second A CD counter: 4:11-4:26
 - 3. B CD counter: 4:27-4:41
- h. CD counter: 4:42-5:26 **chorus 7 (AAB):** tenor saxophone solo cont.
- 1. first A CD counter: 4:42-4:56
 - 2. second A CD counter: 4:57-5:11
 - 3. B CD counter: 5:12-5:26
- i. CD counter: 5:27-5:44 **chorus 7** vamp for ten measures (as tenor saxophonist completes solo)
- j. CD counter: 5:45-6:30 **chorus 7 (AAB):** out head (original written melody played by tenor sax and trumpet)
- 1. first A CD counter: 5:45-6:00
 - 2. second A CD counter: 6:01-6:15
 - 3. B CD counter: 6:16-6:30
- k. CD counter: 6:31-7:14 **chorus 7** vamp (last measure determined by visual signal, e.g., head nod)