

An Introduction to Jazz

Grade 5 | Lesson Plan 2: Early Jazz

Adapted from Jazz in America: The National Jazz Curriculum

TOPICS:

1. Early Jazz
2. Cultural Implications of Early Jazz

SESSION OBJECTIVES

The student will:

1. Gain a fundamental understanding of early jazz, including:
 - a. Early Jazz and Dixieland
 - b. Roaring Twenties
2. understand the historical significance and cultural implications of Early Jazz

MATERIALS

1. Computer with internet connection
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 fundamentals of Early Jazz and Dixieland
2. discuss historical and cultural implications of Early Jazz
3. play various jazz recordings of Early Jazz

STUDENT ACTIVITIES:

The students will:

1. participate in a class discussion regarding Early Jazz and Dixieland
2. participate in a class discussion regarding the cultural implications of Early Jazz
3. listen to jazz recordings of Early Jazz

Content Outline

I. Early Jazz

A. The Music

Early Jazz - or Dixieland - developed in the early 20th century (1900 – 1928); its four main influences were ragtime, military brass bands, the blues, and gospel music.

B. Instrumentation

The usual instrumentation of a Dixieland band was (and still is) trumpet (or cornet), clarinet, trombone, piano, string bass (or tuba), drums, and banjo (or guitar).

C. Collective Improvisation

The primary feature of Dixieland jazz is "collective improvisation;" that is, rather than each musician taking a solo in turn (as in most styles of jazz today), Dixieland jazz musicians all improvise at the same time.

D. Roles of Each Instrument

Each instrument has its own specific role:

1. trumpet or cornet: plays the melody (jazzed up)
2. clarinet: adds to (embellishes) the melody
3. trombone: usually embellishes the bass line but sometimes plays the melody, "afterbeats" (adding to the rhythm), and sound effects such as "smears" and "slides"
4. piano and banjo (or guitar): play chords
5. string bass or tuba: plays the bass line
6. drums: keeps the beat steady and swinging

E. Marching Bands

Dixieland bands (excluding piano and using tuba rather than string bass) were originally small marching bands.

F. Funeral Processions

Besides playing for dances and parties, in the early 1900's Dixieland bands would also play for funerals (marching along with the procession) in celebration of the life of the departed.

G. Louis Armstrong

There were few long solos in Dixieland jazz until the appearance of trumpeter Louis Armstrong.

1. Louis Armstrong was the first great jazz soloist (improviser) and one of the most important figures in jazz history.
2. There are those who say that without Louis Armstrong, there would be no jazz today.

H. Musicians

Almost all early Dixieland jazz musicians were African American.

I. Listening Examples

Listen to recordings of early jazz:

1. King Oliver and Louis Armstrong's "Dippermouth Blues" and the Original Dixieland Jass Band's "Dixie Jazz Band One-Step" on the IHJ YouTube playlist

2. Louis Armstrong's "Workingman Blues," the Original Dixieland Jass Band's "Livery Stable Blues," Jelly Roll Morton's "Jelly Roll Blues," and Bix Beiderbecke's "Singin' the Blues" (available via YouTube)

II. Cultural Implications of Early Jazz

A. Newfound Freedom

The collective improvisation of Dixieland jazz represented, in part, African Americans' newfound freedom.

1. Although hardly experiencing civil rights, African Americans were no longer slaves and celebrated their newfound freedom through jazz improvisation, playing whatever they wanted; they were not "restricted" to notes written on a page, but instead could play whatever they "heard" in their hearts and minds (the music was not read, it was played "by ear").
2. Freedom was and continues to be an integral issue for all styles of jazz.

B. Geographical Expansion

Early jazz made its way from New Orleans, to Chicago, to New York, to the rest of the United States and internationally.

C. Roaring Twenties and the Harlem Renaissance

Dixieland was the musical backdrop of city life in the United States during the Roaring Twenties and the early years of the Harlem Renaissance.