

An Introduction to Jazz

Grade 5 | Lesson Plan 5: Bebop

Adapted from Jazz in America: The National Jazz Curriculum

TOPICS:

1. Bebop
2. Cultural Implications of Bebop

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

The student will:

1. gain a fundamental understanding of bebop
2. explore how bebop reflected the historical context of the 1940's and 1950's

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 bebop
2. discuss the historical and cultural context surrounding bebop
3. play various jazz recordings, including examples of bebop

STUDENT ACTIVITIES:

The students will:

1. participate in a class discussion regarding bebop
2. participate in a class discussion regarding jazz in the historical context of the 1940's and 1950's
3. listen to jazz recordings of bebop

Content Outline

I. **Bebop**

A. **The Music**

Bebop was at the forefront of jazz and went through its most concentrated growth and development from 1940 – 1955.

B. **Instrumentation**

Bebop was primarily played by small groups (combos).

1. A typical Bebop combo is comprised of two horns (e.g., trumpet and saxophone) and rhythm section (piano, bass, and drums).
2. Although usually a quintet, Bebop combos can range in size from a trio (e.g., piano, bass, and drums) to a septet (e.g., three horns, guitar, and rhythm section - piano, bass, and drums).

C. **Jam Sessions**

Bebop, in large part, developed through jam sessions.

1. Jam sessions are informal, non-rehearsed gatherings of musicians where they play together, challenge each other (who can "outplay" whom), and learn from each other.
2. Jam sessions can be held anywhere (e.g., someone's house, a bar, nightclub, etc.). Some of the most famous jam sessions in jazz history occurred at a nightclub called Minton's Playhouse in Harlem in the 1940's.
3. Bebop was, and still is, the music most played at jazz jam sessions because all the musicians need to know are the head (the song's main melody) and chords.

D. **Bebop vs. Big Band Swing**

Bebop is far more musically complex than its Big Band Swing forbearer.

1. Tempos are often much faster (although the Bebop style can be played at any tempo).
2. Bebop melodies are more intricate and difficult to play than swing melodies.
3. Bebop musicians improvise far more complex solos than those of the Swing Era.
4. Bebop requires musical virtuosity and artistry to play it.

E. **Art Music**

Whereas Big Band Swing was considered entertainment (i.e., dance music), Bebop was considered art music (like classical music, bebop was for listening only); Bebop musicians considered themselves artists, not merely entertainers.

F. **Bebop was primarily an African American invention.**

Two of the most important Bebop musicians were:

1. alto saxophonist Charlie Parker (his nickname was "Bird")
2. trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie

G. **Scat Singing**

1. Scat singing (a.k.a. "scatting") is a type of singing whereby the vocalist imitates the style of Bebop jazz solos (as played by instrumentalists) using nonsense syllables. Scat solos, like their instrumental counterparts, are improvised.
2. One of the most important scat singers was Ella Fitzgerald.

H. **Listening Examples**

Listen to examples of Bebop:

1. Charlie Parker's *Ko-Ko*
2. Dizzy Gillespie's *Shaw 'Nuff*
3. Thelonious Monk's *Blue Monk*
4. Ella Fitzgerald's *How High the Moon*

II. Cultural Implications of Bebop

A. World War II

The demise of the Swing Era big bands was, in part, due to World War II.

1. The draft. Many jazz musicians were called to war, leaving few at home.
2. Transportation to reach night spots outside city limits was difficult due to gas shortages (gas rationing), tire shortages (rubber rationing), and the dismantling of urban and interurban railways.
3. Midnight curfews ("brown-outs")

B. Racism

Racism and segregation were rampant in America during the Swing and Bebop eras.

C. A True African American Art Form

African American jazz musicians became increasingly disenchanted with swing music the more they watched European Americans capitalize on it. They wanted to create their "own" music, a music that was not for dancing but for listening: a true African American art form.

D. Reflection of the Culture

Bebop reflected the culture of the times. Like the African American experience at the time, the music:

1. was difficult
2. alluded to the blues
3. explored new directions and uncharted territory
4. was separate from the mainstream of America