

An Introduction to Jazz

Grade 5 | Lesson Plan 3: The Swing Era

Adapted from Jazz in America: The National Jazz Curriculum

TOPICS:

1. The Swing Era
2. Cultural Implications of Swing

SESSION OBJECTIVES

The student will:

1. gain a fundamental understanding of Swing
2. understand the historical significance and cultural implications of the Swing Era

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 Swing
2. discuss historical and cultural implications of Swing
3. play various jazz recordings from the Swing Era

STUDENT ACTIVITIES:

The students will:

1. participate in a class discussion regarding big band Swing Era jazz
2. participate in a class discussion regarding the cultural implications of the Swing Era
3. listen to jazz recordings of big band swing

Content Outline

I. Early Jazz

A. The Music

Big band swing was at the forefront of jazz and underwent its most concentrated growth and development from 1930 – 1945.

B. The Big Band Era

The Swing Era is also known as the Big Band Era since the number of instruments in these bands was considerably larger than during the previous Dixieland era.

C. Instrumentation

While any jazz band with 10 or more instruments is considered a big band, the most common number of instruments in a big band was (and still is) 17:

1. five saxophones (two alto saxes, two tenor saxes, and one baritone sax)
2. four trumpets
3. four trombones
4. four "rhythm" instruments (piano, bass, drums, guitar)

D. Dance Bands

Big band swing music was primarily for dancing, i.e., swing bands were dance bands.

E. Call and Response

"Call and Response" was a common musical device.

1. This is where one section (say, the brass section, i.e., trumpets and trombones) would play a musical phrase and then be "answered" by another section (say, the saxes); the first phrase is the call, the answer is the response (like a musical conversation). This would go back and forth a number of times.
2. For an example of call and response, listen to the introduction of Fletcher Henderson's *Wrappin' it Up*

F. Important Figures

The most important figures in the Swing Era were:

1. pianist Duke Ellington
2. pianist Count Basie
3. clarinetist Benny Goodman (known as the "King of Swing")

G. Listening Examples

Listen to recordings of Swing Era jazz:

1. Count Basie's *One O'Clock Jump*, Duke Ellington's *East St. Louis Toodle-o*, and Fletcher Henderson's *Wrappin' it Up*, OR
2. Count Basie's *Jumpin' at the Woodside*, Duke Ellington's *Main Stem*, and Benny Goodman's *Sing, Sing, Sing*

II. Cultural Implications of Swing

A. Great Depression

After the Stock Market Crash of 1929, swing helped the United States through the Great Depression, creating escape from economic realities via swing dancing.

B. Sophistication

Jazz reached new levels of sophistication in the Swing Era as an outgrowth of America's need for self-esteem following the Great Depression.

C. World War II

Swing served as a major morale booster for Allied troops and people at home during World War II.

D. Race Relations

1. Perhaps for the first time, it did not matter what color you were, just how well you could play.
2. In an era when racial integration was not yet accepted by American society in general, several important swing bands featured racial integration.
3. The first important interracial groups were The Benny Goodman Trio, Quartet, Sextet, and Big Band, all of which were formed in 1935 (prior to this time, jazz groups were either all white or all black).

E. Harlem Renaissance

Swing, and especially Duke Ellington's music of the early 1930s, was the musical backdrop during the later years of the Harlem Renaissance.