

LEARNING LINKS

**JazzReach:
Ellington!**

WEDNESDAY
OCTOBER 21 2015
11 AM

2015 > 2016

BROADEN THE HORIZONS
OF YOUR CLASSROOM.
EXPERIENCE THE VIBRANT
WORLD OF THE ARTS
AT THE McCALLUM!



McCallum Theatre Institute
Field Trip Series



McCALLUM THEATRE INSTITUTE
PRESENTS

JazzReach: Ellington!

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“My men and my race
are the inspiration of my
work. I try to catch the
character and mood and
feeling of my people.”

Duke Ellington

Connecting to Curriculum and Students' Lives!

HISTORY • New York, African-American history

ARTS • Jazz, musical instruments

Expanding the Concept of Literacy

What is a “text”? We invite you to consider the performances on McCallum’s Field Trip Series as non-print texts available for study and investigation by your students. Anyone who has shown a filmed version of a play in their classroom, used a website as companion to a textbook, or asked students to do online research already knows that “texts” don’t begin and end with textbooks, novels, and reading packets. They extend to videos, websites, games, plays, concerts, dances, radio programs, and a number of other non-print texts that students and teachers engage with on a regular basis.

We know that when we expand our definition of texts to the variety of media that we use in our everyday lives, we broaden the materials and concepts we have at our disposal in the classroom, increase student engagement, and enrich learning experiences.

Please consider how utilizing your McCallum performance as a text might align to standards established for reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language.

How do we help students to use these texts as a way of shaping ideas and understanding the world?

Please use this material to help you on this journey.

NON-PRINT TEXT • any medium/text that creates meaning through sound or images or both, such as symbols, words, songs, speeches, pictures, and illustrations not in traditional print form including those seen on computers, films, and in the environment.

The Work of Art

A Non-print Text for Study

- What's it made of? How can this work serve as a *Common Core State Standards*-mandated "text" for student study in the classroom?



It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing. So run the lyrics in one of Duke Ellington's signature songs. We can't get those words – or notes or rhythms – out of our heads. And indeed JazzReach, who pays us yet another visit (they're beginning to feel like old friends) can't get jazz off the brain. With them, it's a passion. Leader H. Benjamin Schuman notes that spreading the gospel about jazz – our truly native art form and every school child deserves to know it – is their mission in life. In this latest offering (and one we may confess we are very excited about) the New York-based outfit turns its attention to one of the seminal – and most extraordinary – exponents of the genre: the Duke. This is a presentation commissioned by and successfully premiered at the Robert Ferst Center for Performing Arts in 2011. Like all of JazzReach's excursions into the world of educational music-making, you can be sure that they'll be engaging each and every audience member with illuminating information, lively musical examples and interactive multi-media. They'll be getting us on our feet, enlisting our clapping hands, our snapping fingers and our rhythmic kinesis. No passivity here! JazzReach is all about collaboration – between artists and audience – a relationship that very much mirrors the back and forth interactivity demanded by the art form itself.

"JazzReach is steadfastly dedicated to fostering a greater appreciation, awareness and understanding of this rich, vital, ever-evolving American art form," say they. Since they first unleashed their unique brand of musical proselytizing in 1997, JazzReach has zoomed to the top of the heap as one of our nation's leading arts organizations dedicated to jazz. The proof is in the pudding, of course – and these dynamic, innovative musician/educators point triumphantly to the over 255,000 young people served nationwide since the program's inception.

In *Ellington!* students are introduced to a wide variety of Duke's array of musical achievements, from hit songs to blues riffs to extended suites and scores for stage and screen. The elegance of the man, his articulate commentary, eloquence, and abundant artistry come alive for the young mind out in the darkened house – through projected images, voice overs, Mr. Schuman's piquant asides, enlivening riffs from the musicians, and goodness knows what other surprises and blessings.

“Our mission is to make jazz accessible.”

JazzReach

The Artist

- Who has *produced* this text for study?



JAZZREACH AND THEIR RESIDENT ENSEMBLE METTA QUINTET

Suppose you loved something so much you were willing, even driven, to devote your life to sharing it with others. Maybe you already do this? If so, then you already have some insight into how H. Benjamin Schuman feels. Some time ago, this enterprising drummer sold the piano his dying grandmother left for him and with the proceeds he got a logo, an address and a business name. He was bent on building an organization that could bring jazz to youngsters. A bold act, if you ask us. This visionary labored in the wilderness, so to speak, for five years, with just his logo and an unyielding zeal for writing letters and applying for grants. At last, something happened. The ASCAP Foundation came through with a \$5,000 grant. JazzReach was born! Right away it swung into action with its first presentation – *Get Hip!*

Perhaps you even recall that show from a few seasons ago? Here's the recipe: add multimedia elements to one jazz quintet, stir in Schuman's pithy instruction, and voila! You have a kid-friendly entry into that most American of music genres: jazz.

Schuman himself, a native of Lansing, Michigan, first began to thump a drumhead when he was all of 13. In those heady days, a high school education included thorough musical training, and he availed himself of the opportunity. After a stint at Berklee College of Music, he entered into a career as a working musician. The rest of his story you already know.

Contexts

- What *information* surrounds this text for study & could help make students' engagement with it more powerful?

“His music
sounds like America.”

Winton Marsalis

Son of two pianists, Edward Kennedy Ellington was born in 1899. His mother, Daisy, played parlor songs and was the daughter of a former slave. His father, J. E., liked playing arias from the opera. Daisy Ellington wanted her son to grow up behaving in a classy way, so she made sure he was surrounded by women who exuded dignity. Among these was his first piano teacher, Marietta Clinkscales. "His casual, offhand manner, his easy grace, and his dapper dress gave him the bearing of a young nobleman," claimed chums, one of whom gave him his famous nickname. Ellington commented, "My friend felt that in order for me to be eligible for his constant companionship, I should have a title, so he called me Duke."

At first the lad was more interested in baseball than the piano. Ellington reminisced, "President [Theodore] Roosevelt would come by on his horse sometimes and stop to watch us play." His first job was selling peanuts at Senators baseball games. He missed more lessons than he showed up for, figuring he had no real talent for the piano! He would sneak into the pool room, however, and hear piano players do things that mightily inspired him. Eventually he came around thinking maybe playing the piano might be all right after all. From then on, he was dedicated to music. In those early years he couldn't read music, so his first compositions (*Soda Fountain Rag* for example) were created and played by ear. "I would play the *Soda Fountain Rag* as a one-step, two-step, waltz, tango and fox trot," Ellington recalled. "Listeners never knew it was the same piece. I was established as having my own repertoire."

Dazzled by hearing such virtuosos as Eubie Blake, Ellington began studying harmony, learning to read music, and developing his technique. Late in 1917, he formed his first group, The Duke's Serenaders. Their first play date netted him 75 cents! The word began to spread and both black and white audiences thronged to hear them, a rarity in those times. Later, they moved to Harlem which was entering its Renaissance. 1924 saw the band cutting their first records — and three short years later they settled in at their legendary Cotton Club engagement.

Part of what made the Ellington sound unique, setting the stage for these exceptional successes, was "the non-traditional expression of Ellington's arrangements, the street rhythms of Harlem, and the exotic-sounding trombone growls and wah-wahs, high-squealing trumpets, and sultry saxophone blues licks of the band members." Trumpeter Bubber Miley, a member of the band for a short period also exerted a major influence on Ellington's sound. His trumpet growled. This was in sharp contrast to the "sweet" sound the group had produced up to that point. The other musicians responded by changing what they were doing, making a hotter sound. People called this "jungle" style.



Later, as Swing began to sweep the country, Ellington's band (while very well able to swing!) wisely played to its strengths: mood and nuance, and richness of composition. "Jazz is music; swing is business," said Ellington. He began making recordings that featured smaller groups (sextets and octets, for example) and highlighted specific instrumentalists, like Johnny Hodges in *Jeep's Blues* and Cootie Williams in *Echoes of Harlem*.

The Duke was responsible for creating over 1,000 songs in his fifty year career. Some of the better known ones are *It Don't Mean a Thing if It Ain't Got That Swing*, *Sophisticated Lady*, *Solitude*, *In a Mellotone*, *Satin Doll*, and what may be his most famous piece, *Mood Indigo*. He played over 20,000 performances the world over, including in Europe, Latin America, the Middle East and Asia. The various genres he explored include jazz, pop, theater, blues, gospel, film scores and classical. Some people feel, however, that his greatest genius – and his most visionary work – occurred in the area of his extended suites. Beginning with *Black, Brown and Beige* in 1943 and extending through *The Uwis Suite* in the 70s, he turned to the suite format to expand the scope and resonance of his jazz songs, as well as to celebrate the experience of being African-American. Asked what inspired him to write, Ellington replied, "My men and my race are the inspiration of my work. I try to catch the character and mood and feeling of my people." It's worth noting, too, that he resisted calling his own music jazz, preferring instead "American music." The musicians who most impressed him were those he said operated "beyond category."

Biographer Barry Ulanov wrote in 1946:

...from [the Broadway composer] Will Vodery – as he (Ellington) says himself – he drew his chromatic convictions, his use of the tones ordinarily extraneous to the diatonic scale, with the consequent alteration of the harmonic character of his music, its broadening, the deepening of his resources. It has become customary to ascribe the classical influences upon Duke – Delius, Debussy and Ravel – to direct contact with their music. Actually his serious appreciation of those and other modern composers came after his meeting with Vodery.

Something else that loomed large in his creative process was the idea of mood. He intended his songs to capture moods, and he would identify these briefly before playing a particular piece. It's been said that hearing these introductions is akin to looking deep into the background of an old photo of New York and noticing the now vanished details that gave the city its character. "The memory of things gone," Ellington once said, "is important to a jazz musician," and what he has to say about his songs serve as the record of those things gone.

On the matter of musical integrity, rigor, and improvisation:

"The writing and playing of music is a matter of intent... You can't just throw a paint brush against the wall and call whatever happens, art. My music fits the tonal personality of the player. I think too strongly in terms of altering my music to fit the performer to be impressed by accidental music. You can't take doodling seriously."

As a band leader, he did something other great composers like Mozart have done: he conducted from the keyboard. He was not a harsh leader, preferring instead to control his musicians through charm, humor and psychology. Before the public he was charisma itself – affable and eloquent. Privately however he was complex. He would share his true feelings only with those closest to him.

In the mid-50s, the Duke's appearance at the Newport Jazz Festival reignited a career that had been slowly eroded by recent musical developments like Bebop. A whole new generation discovered him as the result of the recording of this legendary set – as well as his appearance on the cover of *Time*, an unusual distinction for a jazz man. It remained then only for the accolades to come showering down on him. President Johnson presented Ellington with the President's Gold Medal in 1966. Three years later he received the Medal of Freedom from President Nixon. He amassed 13 Grammy awards, a Pulitzer Prize, and the French Legion of Honor. At his funeral in 1974, the singer Ella Fitzgerald, with whom he often collaborated, said, "It's a very sad day...a genius has passed."

To get ready for the performance, students could research these:

- Jazz – collaboration, improvisation, syncopation and musical elements
- Duke Ellington, his life & contributions



Here's a 60 minute lesson in collaboration & problem-solving you could teach to help prepare students for this work:

Line of Inquiry* How does JazzReach, in acquainting us with works of Duke Ellington, allow us to discern the element of mood embedded in his music?

ASK: What are moods? What are moods a piece of music could express?

SHARE CONTEXT: Duke Ellington liked to try and express particular moods in his pieces of music. Although we in the audience may not always be able to know exactly what he had in mind, chances are if we listen closely we can decide for ourselves what mood or moods we think the music is expressing.

Play *Sophisticated Lady* which can be found on YouTube – www.youtube.com/watch?v=brqxEdwsTQs

ASK: What mood do you think this music expresses? As you listen, write down words that describe the mood.

Have students share aloud what they've written.

ASK: What specific sounds in the piece made you think that?

Repeat this same process with each of these performances on YouTube:

Satin Doll – www.youtube.com/watch?v=TrytKuC3Z_o

It Don't Mean a Thing – www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDQpZT3GhDg&playnext=1&list=PLAD5521EC4A75A843&feature=results_main

ASK: If you were going to write a piece of music and you wanted it to express a particular mood, what mood would you choose, why, and what are some of the things you would have to put into the music in order for it to have that mood?

**A Line of Inquiry is an Essential Question that generates a lesson*

After coming to the theater, students could research these:

- New York in the 1930's
- Mood in music
- JazzReach

“Jazz has the ability to enrich and elevate [students] in ways that a lot of pop music doesn't.”

H. Benjamin Schuman

Here's a 45-60 minute lesson you could teach after students have experienced the work:

Facilitate a discussion of the performance. Ask open ended questions about collaboration, improvisation, solos versus ensemble, leadership and commentary in between pieces.

ASK: What are some of the things that JazzReach has taught us about music, about jazz in particular, and about Duke Ellington?

Have students write a letter to JazzReach, conveying the following:

1. Names and brief descriptions of the pieces they especially liked.
2. Describe one way they think Duke Ellington made a difference in people's lives.
3. Something about their own experience at the McCallum Theatre.
4. Describe one thing they learned about music by going to this performance.



What's *your* read of this non-print text?

How would you answer these questions – and how could they be adapted as Guiding Questions to spark student discussion?

- Which moments do you recall most indelibly, and why?
- How were the players communicating with each other?
- Were you ever able to hear something that struck you as improvisational? What made it seem that way? How would you characterize those moments in which improvisation does not seem to be happening?
- What did you notice about how the five different instruments interacted – and what new awareness of music did this bring you?
- What was the order of the program (what came first, second, etc.) and how was this structure effective?
- How is the audience an active participant in this performance?
- What methods of education were used by the performers?
- Which musical elements seemed to belong to the world of jazz? To other kinds of music?
- How is this music unique, would you say?
- If the performers were showman-like, what did they do that conveyed this?
- How did the spatial arrangement of the players appear to affect their playing?
- What effect do you think the audience had on the players?
- If you had to describe the sounds of their instruments in terms of color(s), what words would you use?
- How would you describe their playing?
- How is this format a good one for instructing? For entertaining?
- How was this performance targeted to student age range?
- What did you learn about Duke Ellington?

Internet

Super jazz site

www.pbs.org/jazz/

This PBS site offers fun, informative info in connection with Ken Burn's acclaimed documentary. A special section called JazzKids is designed just for students.

Big band era jazz for kids

www.bobethomas.com/history/history_big_band_kids.htm

Official Ellington website

www.dukeellington.com/

Books

Jazz

By: Walter Dean Myers
Reading level: Ages 4–8
Publisher: Holiday House (2008)
ISBN-10: 0823421732

This Jazz Man

By: Karen Ehrhardt
Reading level: Ages 4–8
Publisher: Harcourt Children's Books (2006)
ISBN-10: 0152053077

Using a lively version of the children's song *This Old Man*, this book introduces famous African–American jazz musicians as it counts to nine.

The Sound That Jazz Makes

By: Carole Boston Weatherford
Reading level: Ages 4–8
Publisher: Walker Books for Young Readers (2001)
ISBN-10: 0802776744

Molding her rhymed text to the rhythms and cadences of *This Is the House That Jack Built*, Weatherford distills an entire course in music history, tracing the roots of jazz back to its origins in Africa and up to its current incarnation in rap and hip hop.

Duke Ellington: The Piano Prince and His Orchestra

By: Andrea Pinkney
Reading level: Ages 5 and up
Publisher: Hyperion Book (2006)
ISBN-10: 0786814209

Told in a swiny conversational tone and highlighting the musician's childhood, early ragtime days, and stellar rise to popularity. Phrases such as "sassy ride on his cymbal," "musical stream," and "purple dash of brass" carry the auditory experiences of the Duke's music right off the page.

Duke Ellington (Getting to Know the World's Greatest Composers)

By: Mike Venezia
Reading level: Ages 6 and up
Publisher: Childrens Press Chicago (1996)
ISBN-10: 0516445405

Duke Ellington: His Life in Jazz with 21 Activities

By: Stephanie Stein Crease
Reading level: Ages 9 and up
Publisher: Chicago Review Press; 1 edition (2009)
ISBN-10: 1556527241
Comprehensive biography with engaging activities.

Books

The Life and Times of Duke Ellington (Masters of Music)

By: John Bankston

Reading level: Ages 10 and up

Publisher: Mitchell Lane Pub Inc (2004)

ISBN-10: 1584152486

CDS

Essential Duke Ellington

Original Release Date: 2005

Number of Discs: 2

Format: Original recording remastered

Label: Sony

ASIN: B0009ROSC8

A good introductory compilation of some of the Duke's vast output.

At the Cotton Club

Artist: Duke Ellington

Original Release Date: 2011

Number of Discs: 2

Label: 1-2-3-4 GO

ASIN: B00477BE7K

The radio programs that made Duke Ellington famous all over America!

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**“A jazz ensemble functions
like a community...
the music is a metaphor
for promoting values...
participation and interaction
within a community.”**

H. Benjamin Schuman