

Social Studies

Jazz, Jazz, Jazz

by Sharon Franklin



Vocabulary

bass

clarinet

fidgety

forgetful

jammed

nighttime

secondhand

Word count: 1,696

Note: The total word count includes words in the running text and headings only. Numerals and words in chapter titles, captions, labels, diagrams, charts, graphs, sidebars, and extra features are not included.

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The Harlem Renaissance

From 1917 to 1935, Harlem was an important cultural center of the United States. Certain events and people came together in a way that only happens once in a great while. These events led to an explosion of African American art, literature, and music. Historians call this period the Harlem Renaissance. A renaissance is a rebirth, and after World War I, everyone was eager to have life start again.

Who was involved in the music scene in Harlem? How did these composers, singers, and musicians contribute to the development of jazz? What was Harlem like?

The neighborhood of Harlem in 1937





Harlem was bursting with activity in the 1920s.

Harlem

Imagine that it is a hot, steamy summer day in New York in 1924. You are walking down 125th Street. Elderly people sit on their front steps fanning themselves and calling to neighbors. Children jump rope and play ball in the street. **Fidgety** teens tune their radios to the latest music. Everywhere, melodies float out to the street through open windows. A few **forgetful** singers hum along with their favorite songs, even if they can't remember all the words.

As you walk down the street you can hear someone practicing his **secondhand bass**. When you round the corner you find a couple practicing dance steps. This is Harlem in the daytime.

In the **nighttime** this neighborhood is even *more* lively! You might think people would be sleeping at 3 A.M., but not in Harlem. This joint is jumping with the sounds of jazz all night long.

Theaters, cafes, and dance halls offer shows around the clock. People come from all over to be entertained. Some of the jazz musicians performing here will become famous around the world.



Now you have a feeling for what it was like to be in Harlem in the 1920s and 1930s. Let's meet three musicians who helped create all this excitement.

Louis Armstrong, Fletcher Henderson, and Duke Ellington were young men when they came to Harlem. But these three, along with other African American musicians, would change the music scene forever.

They each came from different places but moved to Harlem within four years of each other. What was going on with jazz when these three first got into music? How did they influence the development of jazz?

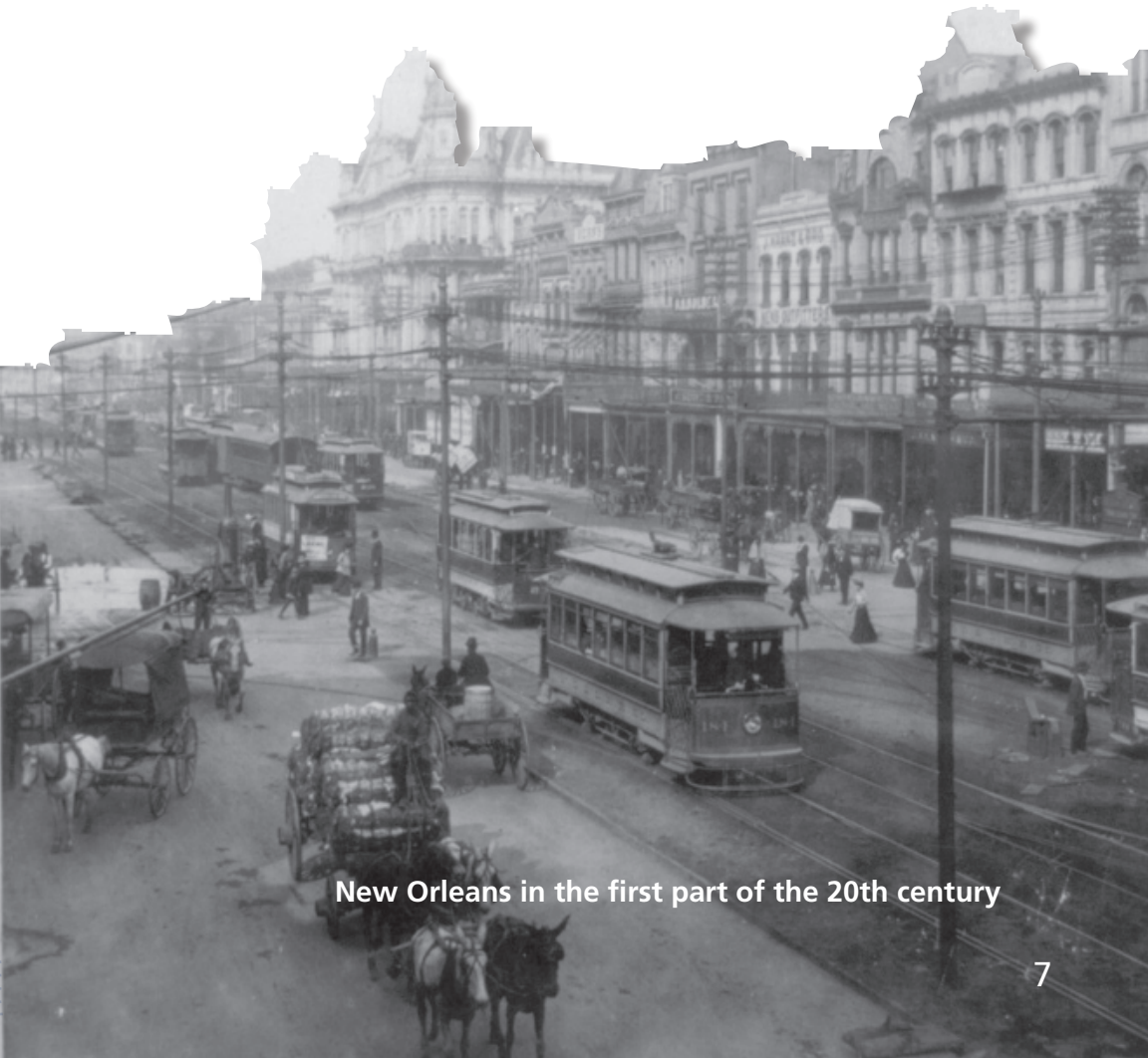


Louis Armstrong (above) and Duke Ellington (left) were two of the musical powerhouses who transformed jazz from an experiment to an art form.

The Birth of Jazz

The story of jazz in Harlem actually begins in the South. We say that jazz was “born” in New Orleans, Louisiana, in the late 1890s and early 1900s. But really, jazz was created over time. Different styles of music came together in unexpected ways.

Local musicians in New Orleans experimented with two types of music called blues and ragtime. They mixed the styles and tried new instruments. They also introduced the idea of improvising, making things up as they went along. This mix of sounds was the beginning of the style of music we call jazz.



New Orleans in the first part of the 20th century

Many of the musicians in New Orleans were Creoles. Creoles, who were descended from African Americans and Louisiana's French and Spanish settlers, shared a blended heritage. They knew about different kinds of music.

New Orleans was also a major port, which meant that people from all over the world could come to this city. It was a place where the mixing of cultures was very much accepted. It makes sense that a new type of music could emerge in a place with open and adventurous people.

Louis Armstrong

Louis Armstrong grew up in New Orleans. When he was seven years old, he bought his first trumpet. As a teenager, he **jammed** with local pick-up bands who were mixing ragtime and blues music.

Recordings Armstrong made with his band, the Hot Five, are considered some of the best in jazz history.





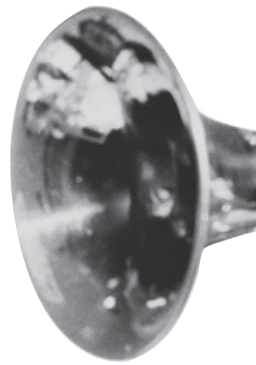
Louis Armstrong, "The King of Jazz"



In 1922 Armstrong left New Orleans for Chicago. There, he joined King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band. The band was popular, but it was Louis Armstrong who was the real star.

Armstrong was known for the joy and energy he brought to his trumpet playing and singing. He had a unique sound that he was constantly improving and modifying. He was a master at improvisation. This made his work exciting and lively.

In 1924 Armstrong was invited to join Fletcher Henderson's big band based in New York City. He moved to Harlem. Armstrong stayed with Henderson's band for only one year. But he would return to New York again in 1926 and make it his home base for the rest of his life.



Scat

Louis Armstrong was both a talented horn player and an inspired singer. He invented a way of singing called "scat." Scat is a way of singing that makes your voice sound like an instrument.

There is a legend that Armstrong invented scat by accident one night while he was performing. They say he dropped his sheet music and started singing nonsense words and sounds, and the audience loved it.

Louis Armstrong is considered one of the greatest jazz musicians of all time.



Scat was new, exciting, and a huge contribution to jazz. This style of performing was picked up by other major singers, such as Ella Fitzgerald.

Louis Armstrong led bands of his own and toured the country in the 1930s. He became a true celebrity. Armstrong's innovations helped make jazz an established and accepted art form.



Louis Armstrong and his band (above)

Ella Fitzgerald (right) was inspired by Armstrong's singing style.





Fletcher Henderson (second from left) and part of his orchestra

Fletcher Henderson

When Fletcher Henderson invited Louis Armstrong to join his band in 1924, Henderson had been in New York for only a few years.

Henderson was born in Georgia and had a degree in chemistry from Atlanta University. In 1920 he came to New York to continue his studies, but he found that chemistry jobs were hard to get because he was African American.

Henderson had played the piano since he was a child, and he soon found work as a pianist. Later, he started a band of his own.

The Big Band Sound

Fletcher Henderson is credited with creating the first jazz big band. At first, his band was a traditional dance band. Then, slowly, he hired more adventurous musicians, such as Louis Armstrong. Together they introduced more African rhythms and jazz sounds.

Henderson had a gift for discovering new talent. Many of the musicians he brought into his band became famous, and in time, almost every important jazz player worked with Henderson. This made Henderson's group the most successful African American band of the 1920s.

Henderson also arranged music, both for his band and for others, including many white bands. In 1939 Henderson was hired by Benny Goodman. This was the first time a white band hired an African American musician to appear on stage with them.

Many white bands played African American jazz.





Fletcher Henderson was a bandleader and a music arranger.

Throughout the 1920s, the biggest and most famous clubs in Harlem introduced white audiences to African American music, though whites and blacks remained separated. But when the Savoy ballroom opened in 1926, it was integrated. The club hired both African American and white musicians, and it allowed both African American and white customers. Fletcher Henderson's band was the first act to open at the Savoy.

The Savoy was one of Harlem's best known nightclubs.



The Savoy was also unique because of its size. It could hold more than four thousand guests. One thing that drew crowds to the Savoy was the club's battle of the bands. Two bands would play, one at either end of the hall, and the dancers would judge which one was best.

Other famous clubs included the Apollo and The Cotton Club. The Cotton Club was where Duke Ellington got his big break.



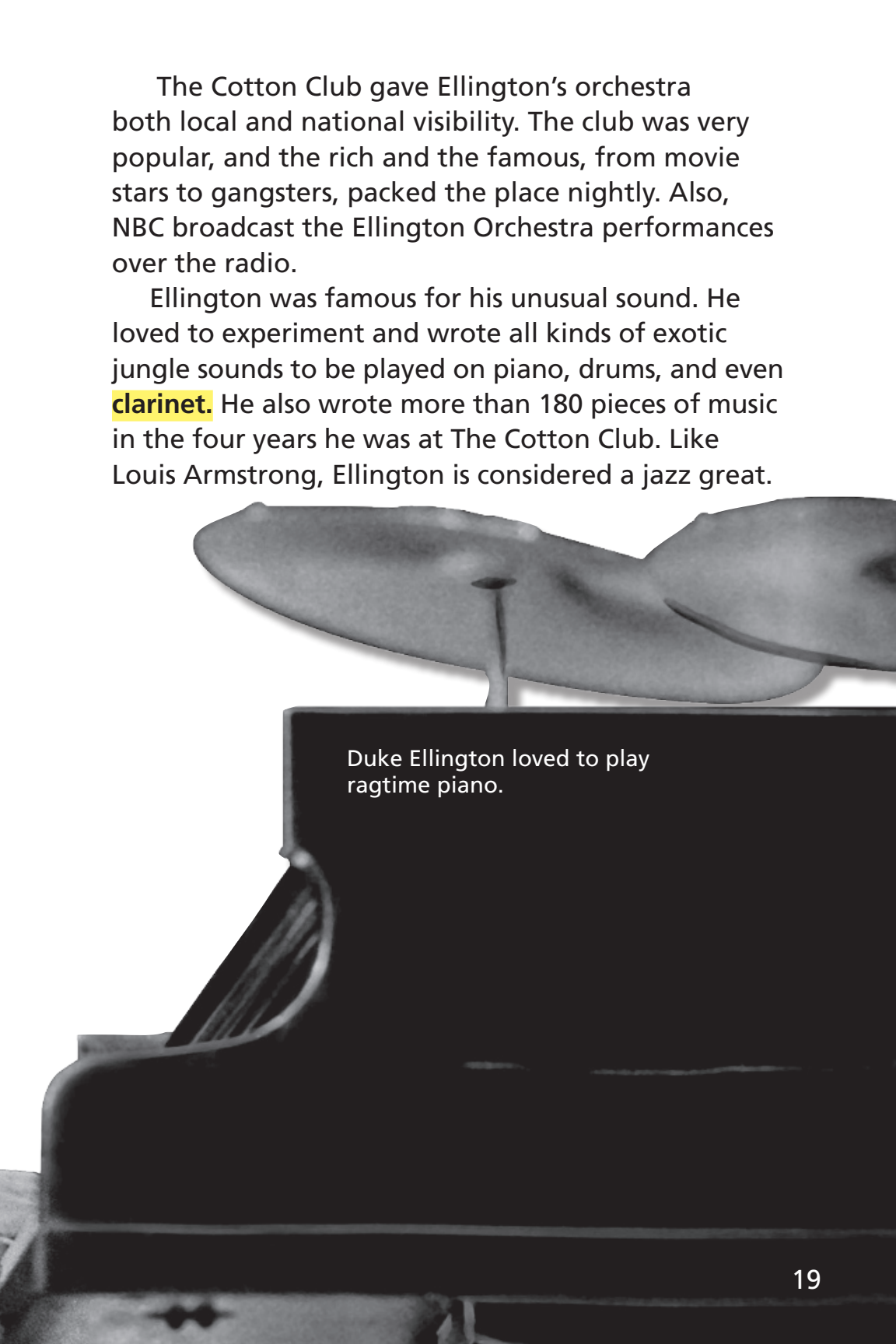
Duke Ellington

Duke Ellington grew up in Washington, DC. He played the piano as a teenager. He moved to New York City in 1923 and started a band called the Washingtonians. In 1927 Ellington and his orchestra were hired to perform at The Cotton Club.



The Cotton Club gave Ellington's orchestra both local and national visibility. The club was very popular, and the rich and the famous, from movie stars to gangsters, packed the place nightly. Also, NBC broadcast the Ellington Orchestra performances over the radio.

Ellington was famous for his unusual sound. He loved to experiment and wrote all kinds of exotic jungle sounds to be played on piano, drums, and even **clarinet**. He also wrote more than 180 pieces of music in the four years he was at The Cotton Club. Like Louis Armstrong, Ellington is considered a jazz great.



Duke Ellington loved to play
ragtime piano.



The Cotton Club

Summary

Louis Armstrong, Fletcher Henderson, and Duke Ellington were three talented musicians who each helped make jazz an established art form. Armstrong's scat singing, Henderson's jazz big band, and Ellington's unique sound are innovations that influence today's musicians.

Afterword: Why the Harlem Renaissance?

Now you know about a few of the musicians who were part of the Harlem Renaissance. But why did so many talented people end up in the same place at the same time? Why did they all have so much energy for creating new kinds of music and other art?

Three factors helped set the stage for the Harlem Renaissance. None of them seemed to have anything to do with music. They were improved education for African Americans, the reaction to World War I, and poverty in the southern states.

Improved Education

In 1863 President Lincoln declared the slaves in the South free. Forty years later, some African Americans were still poor, but they were free. They were allowed to attend public schools.

Young people who can read and write have more ways to express their creativity. They are also better prepared to be in business for themselves. Better education had positive effects on young African Americans who wanted to make a living as musicians.



The Reaction to World War I

After the end of World War I in 1918, Americans were eager to create something new and positive. This was their reaction to the destructiveness of war. This set the stage for great economic growth, as well as for lots of creative work in writing, art, and music.

New York City skyline today

African Americans in the U.S.: From Slavery to The Harlem Renaissance

1863:
President Lincoln
declares the slaves
in the South free.

1900–1930:
The Great Migration

1860

1900

The Great Migration

During the early 1900s, more than a million African Americans moved from the South to the North in search of jobs. They left places like New Orleans and ended up in cities like Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York. This movement came to be called the Great Migration. It turned out that a lot of very talented people moved to Harlem all at the same time.

Conclusion

These three things together—improved education, reaction to WWI, and the Great Migration—put the players in motion, so they could create the Harlem Renaissance.

1914–1918:
World War I

1917–1935:
The Harlem Renaissance

1910

1920

1930

1940

Glossary

bass *n.* a stringed instrument that plays the lowest tones.

clarinet *n.* a long, thin woodwind instrument with a reed mouthpiece, played by means of holes and keys.

fidgety *adj.* restless

forgetful *adj.* likely to forget; having a poor memory.

jammed *v.* took part in a gathering of musicians where music was played and improvised.

nighttime *n.* time between evening and morning.

secondhand *adj.* not purchased new; already used by someone else.

Reader Response

1. Louis Armstrong moved several times before settling in New York. Use a chart like the one below to list in order the dates and events mentioned in the book that end with his making New York his home base.

↓
↓

2. What are some things you know about American history that help you understand the importance of the rise of African American music?
3. How does the context for of the word *jammed* on page 8 help you know the meaning of the word?
4. What are some other events from the book that could be added to the time line on pages 22 and 23?

Suggested levels for Guided Reading, DRA™, Lexile®, and Reading Recovery™ are provided in the Pearson Scott Foresman Leveling Guide.

Genre	Comprehension Skills and Strategy	Text Features
Narrative nonfiction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sequence• Fact and Opinion• Prior Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Captions• Glossary• Time Line

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