

Jazz Books for Children

Grades to 6-12

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Although each listing includes a suggestion for the appropriate grade level, many of the books may be of interest to a younger or older student depending on reading ability, background knowledge, or musical training in jazz. This website, www.smithsonianjazz.org, also has an annotated bibliography for grades K-6 that includes books that would appeal to someone in the upper grades who is reading about jazz for the first time, and who would like introductory “user-friendly” background information.

Asirvatham, Sandy. *The History of Jazz*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003. Grades 6 and up. The history of jazz music and important artists from New Orleans up to funky fusions and beyond. Chronology, websites, and recommended reading at the end of book.

Asirvatham, Sandy. *The History of the Blues*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003. Grades 7 and up. The history of blues music from its origins through the 1990s. Focuses on the history, styles, and important musicians.

Awmiller, Craig. *The House On Fire: The Story of the Blues*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1996. Grades 10 and up. Readers gain insight into why this music is so powerful and why it has influenced so many artists. The author traces the history of the blues from its African roots through the 90s, with a focus on key artists ranging from Blind Lemon Jefferson, Louis Armstrong to Muddy Waters and B.B. King. Concluding chapters focus on the meaning of the blues, and the blues today.

Ayazi-Hashjin, Sherry. *Rap and Hip Hop: The Voice of a Generation*. New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, Inc., 1999. Grades 6-8. The author traces rap and hip-hop back to African musical roots (drumming and the griot) to America and the blues, spirituals, and jazz.

Bankston, John. *The Life and Times of Duke Ellington*. Hockessin, DE: Mitchell Lane Publishers, 2005 (part of the *Masters of Music* greatest composer series). Grade 6. Five short chapters which focus on different aspects of Duke Ellington’s life and career. Each chapter includes an historical one-page *FYInfo* and color photos. A timeline, selected works, chronology, and suggested further reading are included at the end.

Bernotas, Bob. *Branford Marsalis, Jazz Musician*. Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow Publishers, Inc., 1994. Grades 6-9. In this biography, the reader learns not only about Branford’s career, talents, and the people he worked for, but about the Marsalis family, their philosophies on life and music, and the many decisions that Branford made as he went from classical to jazz to rock to his gig on *The Tonight Show*.

Bayer, Linda. *Quincy Jones*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2001. Grades 6-10. Beginning with an introduction, "On Facing Adversity," by James Scott Brady, the author takes the reader inside Quincy Jones' life—his struggles, rise to fame, victories, encounters with racism, travels, development of his styles, talents and accomplishments, and the brain surgery and other challenges faced throughout his life.

Brown, Gene. *Duke Ellington: Jazz Master*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Silver Burdette, 1990. Grades 6-8. A biography of Duke Ellington that covers his life, career, and importance as a musical pioneer. Readers gain insight into different styles of jazz, important people in the evolution of jazz, and what was happening historically and culturally. Chronology, bibliography, major works, and glossary are included.

Brown, Sanford. *Louis Armstrong*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1993. Grades 6-7. A story of the personal life and career of Louis Armstrong.

Carr, Roy. *A Century of Jazz*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1997. Grades 8 and up. An extensive study of the history of jazz, jazz styles, and artists. Includes also a chapter on jazz movies and festivals, photographs, and album covers and posters.

Cogswell, Michael. *The Offstage Story of Satchmo*. Portland, OR: Collector's Press, Inc., 2003. Grades 7 and up. This is the story of Louis Armstrong told by Michael Cogswell, Director of the Louis Armstrong House and Archives, located at Queens College in New York. This narrative brings the reader into Armstrong's personal and professional career with the memoirs, autobiographical manuscripts, personal diary entries, collages, scrapbooks, snapshots, personal papers, and more items that are in the House and Archives.

Crisp, George R. *Miles Davis*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1997. Grades 7 and up. This biography follows the career and life of Miles Davis: his pampered childhood; his musical growth as he worked with people such as Clark Terry, Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker; his decision to leave Juilliard and be part of the changing jazz scene; his impact on bebop, hard bop, cool jazz, and fusion; his health problems.

Collier, James Lincoln. Note: James Collier has written books with the same titles for young adults that are in the children's section and appropriate for grades 6-9, but he has also written books with the same titles that are in the adult section of the library for grades 11 and up. The following are the easier-to-read ones.

_____. ***Jazz, An American Saga*.** New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1997. Grades 6-9. Explores the history of jazz and the contributions of individual artists.

_____. ***Benny Goodman and the Swing Era*.** New York: Oxford University Press, 1989. Grades 6-9.

_____. ***Duke Ellington*.** New York: Macmillan Co., 1991. Grades 6-8. The life and greatness of Duke Ellington.

Crow, Bill. *Jazz Anecdotes*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. Grades 11 and up. Bassist and jazz writer Bill Crow has compiled stories, interviews, biographies, autobiographies and other sources and organized them by general topics (importance of a good nickname, stage fright, etc).

Fordham, John. *Jazz*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1999. Grades 8 and up. This comprehensive resource with many photos, program bills, etc., includes the story of jazz styles and artists, relevant cultural and historical information for each decade, the anatomy of key instruments and techniques, jazz giants, and a guide to top recordings that includes album covers, information about date recorded, label, musicians, tracks, and appraisal.

Frankl, Ron. *Charlie Parker*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1992. Grades 6-9. A very detailed biography in the series *Black Americans of Achievement*. Readers gain insight not only into his personal life, but the clubs, jam sessions, jazz scene in Kansas City and New York City, all the artists and groups he performed with, his disciples, and how he revolutionized jazz and influenced so many people. The book goes beyond facts and provides personal insight into personalities and his heroin and drinking problems.

_____. ***Duke Ellington: Bandleader and Composer*.** New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988. Grades 6-9. Readers learn about Duke's childhood and the society in which he was raised.

_____. ***Miles Davis*.** New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1995. Grades 6-8.

Gentry, Tony. *Dizzy Gillespie*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1991. Grades 6 and up. A biography of Dizzy Gillespie, as an ambassador of jazz who introduced the world to bebop.

Glover, Savion and Bruce Weber. *My Life In Tap*. New York: William Morrow Company, 2000. Grades 6-12. Inspiring story with insight into Savion Glover's artistic process and what he learned at each stage, from his preschool drummer days to "Bring In da Noise, Bring In da Funk." Readers also gain an understanding of the history of 20th century tap, and its historical, cultural context.

Gottlieb, William. *The Golden Age of Jazz*. Petaluma, CA: Pomegranate Art Books, 1995. Grades 8 and up. The author/photographer, through personal accounts, interviews, and photographs, tells the history of jazz. Includes over 200 jazz musicians from the late 30s through the 40s.

Gourse, Leslie. NOTE: Leslie Gourse has written the following books for the grades indicated that are located in the children's section of the public library, but has also written books on people such as Wynton Marsalis that are in the adult section and geared to grades 11 and up.

_____. ***Blowing on the Changes*.** New York: Franklin Watts, 1982. Grades 6 and up.

_____. ***Billie Holiday: The Tragedy and Triumph of Lady Day*.** New York: Franklin Watts, 1995. Grades 6 and up.

_____. ***Deep Down in Music. The Art of the Great Jazz Bassists*.** New York: Franklin Watts, 1998. Grades 6 and up.

_____. ***Dizzy Gillespie and the Birth of Bebop*.** New York: Atheneum, 1995. Grades 6 and up.

_____. ***Louis' Children. American Jazz Singers.*** New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1984. Grades 6 and up.

_____. ***Striders to Beboppers and Beyond: The Art of Jazz Piano.*** New York: Franklin Watts, 1997. Grades 6 and up.

_____. ***Swingers and Crooners: The Art of Jazz Singing.*** New York: Franklin Watts, 1997. Grades 6 and up. From early singing traditions through gospel and the blues to Louis Armstrong, Big Band, Bebop and through the 1990s, the author chronicles not only the history and art of jazz singing, but highlights many of the swingers and crooners.

_____. ***Wynton Marsalis.*** New York: Franklin Watts, 1999. Grades 6 and up.

Governar, Alan, editor. *Stompin' At The Savoy.* Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press, 2006. Grade 6. This biography of Norma Miller's early life and rise to fame as one of the original performers of the Lindy Hop, is the result of interviews by Alan Governar. It a wonderful personal account told in Norma Miller's voice, that brings the reader inside the Jazz Age, Harlem Renaissance, the Savoy Ballroom, and Whitey's Lindy Hoppers.

Hakim, Joy. *War, Peace, and All That Jazz.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. Grades 6 and up. A history book from the end of World War I to the end of World War II, with a chapter (Chapter 11, "American Music") that focuses on jazz in its early stages, and the Jazz Age. Also, on page 46, there is a reference to Duke Ellington and Romare Bearden.

Haskins, James. *Black Dance in America.* New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Junior Books, 1990. Grades 6 and up.

_____. ***Black Music in America.*** New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Junior Books, 1987. Grades 6 and up. A detailed history of black music in America from its African roots.

_____. ***One Nation Under a Groove: Rap Music and Its Roots.*** New York: Jump At The Sun – Hyperion Books For Children, 2000. Grades 6 –12 (for all grades). An exploration of the history of rap and how elements of rap such as rhyme and social commentary evolved from the griot tradition of West Africa. Includes the history of blues and jazz, and a rap glossary.

Hasse, John Edward. *Beyond Category: The Life and Genius of Duke Ellington.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993. Grades 9 and up. The author provides great insight into the development and evolution of Ellington the musician ("a career biography, not a personal biography"). Throughout the book there are mini essays on the "Essential Ellington" that highlight and discuss some of Ellington's notable recordings from each period. Each chapter discusses how Ellington responded to the major problems he faced in each period of his life – from finding mentors to guide him, to maintaining a big band in tough times. Includes a poetic introduction by Wynton Marsalis.

Hasse, John Edward, ed. *Jazz: The First Century.* New York: William Morrow, 2000. Grades 9 and up. John Hasse along with other respected authorities in the field of jazz has provided readers with a very comprehensive look at and understanding of jazz from its emergence to late-century tradition and innovation. The book includes over 300 wonderful images, including vintage photos by acclaimed photographers such as William Gottlieb and Herman Leonard. There are also sidebars that focus on jazz songs, styles, landmarks, personalities, festivals, techniques, poetry, paintings, and much more, as well as hundreds of

recommended recordings. There is also a teacher's guide (www.jazzfirst.com) with 500 test questions and answers.

Herd, Ron (R2C2H2). *James Reese Europe: Jazz Lieutenant.* Charleston, SC: BookSurge, 2005. Grades 8 and up. Artist R2C2H2 has created a visual narrative of James Reese Europe, an early jazz pioneer. It provides information on how Europe formed the first significant all Black musician union and booking agency in the US, and was the first Black to lead troupes into battle during World War One. Each page of narration is accompanied by a full-page black and white artistic rendition by the artist.

Igus, Toyomi. *i see the rhythm.* San Francisco: Children's Book Press, 1998. Grades 6 and up. The author and illustrator introduce the reader to an overview of jazz from its African origins through to hip-hop. Each two-page section includes a prose poem, a historical timeline of important cultural and historical events, and a painting. Included are ragtime, birth of the blues, New Orleans, swing, jazz women, bebop, cool jazz, gospel, rhythm and blues, funk, rap.

Kallen, Stuart A. *The History of Jazz.* Farmington Hills, MI: Lucent Books, 2003. Grades 6 and up. The book begins with an introduction to the feel, sound and evolution of jazz, and then follows the history of jazz from its roots through swing, bebop, cool jazz and fusion.

Kavanaugh, Lee Hill. *Quincy Jones, Musician, Composer, Producer.* Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow Publishing, Inc., 1990. This biography follows the life and accomplishments of Quincy Jones, jazz musician, record producer, and composer of movie scores and television themes, who worked with many musical styles from bebop to hip-hop. It follows Quincy from his inner-city days of poverty in Chicago to the late 1990s when he was executive producer for the 1996 Academy Awards ceremony, and 1997 when he launched the late night talk show, *Vibe*. As he does this, the author provides background information on the artists and jazz styles of each period of time.

King, Johnny. *What Jazz Is: An Insider's Guide To Understanding and Listening To Jazz.* New York: Walker and Company, 1997. Grades 10 and up. Johnny King, jazz pianist, enlightens readers of any level about the basics of jazz, the language of jazz, how jazz works, the roles of different instruments, and some of the playing styles of jazz artists such as John Coltrane, Thelonious Monk and his contemporaries. The beginning chapters, in particular, take the non-musician listener into consideration.

Kliment, Bud. **NOTE:** The following by this author are part of Black America Series and focus on each person's style, historical context, and personal life, with photos throughout each book.

_____. **Billie Holiday.** Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1990. Grades 6 and up. A biography of the famous singer, in the context of her times.

_____. **Count Basie.** Los Angeles: Melrose Square Publishing Co., 1994. Grades 6 and up. A biography of the bandleader-pianist.

_____. **Ella Fitzgerald.** Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988. Grades 6 and up. A biography of the celebrated singer.

Korall, Burt. *Drummin' Men: The Heartbeat of Jazz; The Swing Years.* New York: Schirmer Books, 1990. Grades 11 and up. This personal and informative memoir explores how drummers provide the heartbeat of jazz. Quotes, personal memories and interviews that are interspersed

throughout, bring the reader into the personalities and styles of 23 drummers as such as Chick Webb, Gene Krupa, Dave Tough, Buddy Rich and other major figures.

Krohn, Katherine. *Ella Fitzgerald: First Lady of Song*. Minneapolis: Lerner Publications Company, 2001. Grades 6 and up. This biography follows the life and career of Ella Fitzgerald from her childhood and Amateur Night at the Apollo through to her death in 1996. The reader gains insight into Ella's personality and talent. Includes a list of her Grammy Awards and highlights of her discography, as well as a glossary of jazz terms and suggested further reading.

Marsalis, Wynton, illustrated by Paul Rogers. *Jazz A B Z*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press, 2005. Grades 6 and up. Graphic artist, Paul Rogers designed the portraits of each musician, and Wynton Marsalis created the words/poems for the paintings. Each poem reflects the style and personality of the artists (i.e. Jelly Roll Morton/an ode; Nat King Cole/nursery rhyme pattern; Ella Fitzgerald/call and response/preacher/congregation). Each letter of the alphabet represents an artist and the poem is filled with alliteration. For example: "Mingus makes mad, majestic mindboggling music..." Includes end notes on the poetic forms used throughout (abstract, haiku, Ballad, etc) and connects it to the artists. Also includes a biographical sketch of each artist.

McKissack, Pat & Fredrick McKissack. *Louis Armstrong, Jazz Musician*. Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow Publishers, 2001.

Medearis, Angela Shelf and Michael Medearis. *Dance*. *African-American Arts series*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997. Grades 6 and up. The history of jazz dance from Africa through the Middle Passage and up to the late 1990s.

_____. ***Music*.** *African-American Arts series*. New York: Twenty-First Century Books, 1997. Grades 6 and up. The history of black music from African musical traditions through the Middle Passage up through the late 1990s.

Megill, Donald D. and Richard S Demory. *Introduction to Jazz History*. New York: Prentice-Hall, 1984. Grades 10 and up. This history of the Jazz Age in the United States is divided into eight sections, from the Blues to Jazz/Rock Fusion 1968. The authors look not only at the history of jazz, but also at great jazz performers and how they have been influenced by social and historical forces. Since the authors stress the importance of listening, each chapter includes a suggested discography. Also included are listening guides of specific performances (most drawn from the *Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz*).

Miller, Marc H., ed. *Louis Armstrong, A Cultural Legacy*. New York: The Queens Museum of Art, 1994. Grades 10 and up. Marc Miller and other writers take a look at Louis Armstrong and his music within the historical and cultural context of African American culture. Includes many photos.

Monceaux, Morgan. *Jazz: My Music, My People*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994. Grades 6 and up. Each page includes a painting, a personal recollection by the author, and a short biography, beginning with Buddy Bolden and concluding with jazz singers.

Myers, Walter Dean. *Jazz*. New York: Holiday House, Inc. 2006. Grades 6-12. Fifteen poems celebrate the different styles of jazz from ragtime to swing, bebop to fusion. The book begins with an overview of the evolution of jazz, and ends with a glossary of jazz terms and a jazz timeline.

Old, Wendie C. *Louis Armstrong*. Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow Publishers, Inc., 1998. Grade 6.

Peretti, Burton W. *Jazz in American Culture*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997. Grades 10 and up. A look at how jazz is history and its history key to the development of American culture since the early 1900s, and the role of the arts in history.

Preston, Katherine. *Scott Joplin*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988. Grades 6-9. A biography of Scott Joplin with suggested additional reading, a chronology, compositions and selected discography.

Ritz David. *Ray Charles: Voice of Soul*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1994. Grades 5-7. This is part of a series, ***Great Achievers: Lives of the Physically Challenged***, life stories of disabled men and women who have found the strength and courage to develop their special talents. A biography about how Ray Charles triumphed over poverty, blindness, racism, and drug addiction, and how he developed his own style from gospel and blues.

Roberts, John Storm. *Latin Jazz: The First of the Fusions, 1880s to Today*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1999. Grades 11 and up. A very detailed account of Latin jazz from the "Spanish tinge", and the first Latin influences in New Orleans, to the spread of Latin music through American culture. The reader learns about the history and types of rhythms and dances, Dizzy Gillespie and Cubop, the jazz/Latin fusions, and Latin jazz artists and their influences.

Schoenberg, Loren, with an introduction by Wynton Marsalis. *The NPR Curious Listener's Guide to Jazz*. New York: The Berklee Publishing Group Press, 2002. Grades 10 and up. This is a concise history of jazz, the major figures and classic works and styles. The book includes a chapter that lists 50 recommended essential jazz CDs with a paragraph that provides background on each CD. It is geared for the novice as well as the seasoned jazz listener, as it includes chapters such as "Jazz Deconstructed" that helps the novice understand jazz.

Schwartzman, Myron. *Romare Bearden*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1999. Grades 6 and up. All grades benefit from this book about visual artist Romare Bearden who created a "visual definition of jazz." with his blues and jazz themes. This biography is not just about Bearden's life, career, style, themes, and approach to art, but also about the jazz scene that was integral to Bearden's life and inspired his art work.

Selfridge, John. *John Coltrane: A Sound Supreme*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1999. Grades 7 and up. Traces John Coltrane's career as a jazz saxophonist from his days growing up, early training, work with Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonius Monk, Miles Davis, and Charlie Parker, to his emergence as a jazz giant, as well as his personal life and the difficulties and obstacles he faced.

Smith, Michelle K. *Blues in America: A Social History*. Amawalk, NY: Jackdaw Publications, 1994. Documents, broadsheets, reproducible activities. photos, cassette, study guides, etc. This portfolio of historical documents and audio traces the blues art form from the Mississippi Delta to the West Coast and industrial cities of the North, following the post-war migrations of African-Americans in search of a more equitable life. Includes eleven historical documents, four essays, comprehensive notes on the documents and critical thinking questions. Also includes a cassette tape with songs by Lightnin' Hopkins, Elizabeth Cotten, Ma Rainey,

Muddy Waters, prison work songs, and more. This educational portfolio is a production of the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Smithsonian Institution.

Sutro, Dick. *Jazz For Dummies, 2nd Edition.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Publishing, Inc., 2006. Grades 10 and up. User friendly guide to jazz music, history, players and instruments from its roots up to jazz in popular culture, and future trends. Also includes sections on the best jazz festivals, advice for aspiring players, how to fit into a jazz ensemble, digital jazz, ten great cities for jazz, and tips for building and enjoying a jazz collection.

Tanenhaus, Sam. *Louis Armstrong.* New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989. Grades 6-9. Detailed biography of Louis Armstrong's life and career.

Terkel, Studs. *Giants of Jazz.* New York: Thomas Crowell Company, 1975. Grades 7-12. The lives of 13 jazz musicians and what influenced them, from King Oliver to John Coltrane.

Terrill, Richard. *Duke Ellington.* Chicago: Raintree, 2003. Grades 4-7. This biography includes eight short chapters: *The Early Years, Harlem, The Cotton Club, On the Road, The Swing Era, Facing Challenges, Ellington at Newport,* and *The Highest Honor.* Throughout the book, select words are shown in bold letters, and then defined in the glossary.

Woog, Adam. *The Importance of Duke Ellington.* San Diego: Lucent Books, 1996. Grades 5-10. This is one of many books in a series entitled, *The Importance of Biographies,* that focuses on individuals who have made unique contributions to history. This biography emphasizes how Ellington changed the course of music. Each short chapter begins with a quote by or about Ellington, and also includes a "boxed" excerpt from other books about him.