

Name \_\_\_\_\_

<http://pbskids.org/jazz>

# Duke Ellington



## **Who was Duke Ellington?**

Duke Ellington (1899-1974) is America's greatest composer. Duke led an orchestra, played piano and composed over 2000 pieces of music.

## **How did Duke get his nickname?**

Duke began his life as Edward Kennedy Ellington in Washington, D.C.. He was nicknamed by a classmate who admired him. This royal nickname was appropriate for Duke because of his elegant and proud manner. Even as a child, Duke had fans.

## **As a child, Duke disliked his piano lessons.**

Duke's parents enrolled him in lessons when he was in grade school. He dreaded his lessons and preferred to play baseball instead. His parents insisted that Duke practice piano basics every day. He grew bored with practicing the same tunes and quit his lessons. Duke didn't become interested in learning piano again until he was a teenager.

## **Duke Ellington was attracted to girls and they were attracted to piano players.**

He often joked that he learned to play the piano to attract girls. While washing dishes for his summer job, Duke met a waiter who invited him to go see ragtime pianist, Harvey Brooks. Duke loved the way Brooks expressed himself through his music. Brooks played ragtime in a way that did not follow the rules of classical piano--he had freedom to change the rules and express himself more freely. Duke discovered that he wanted to make his own music too and taught himself how to play piano like Brooks. He practiced until his fingers could fly and even arranged melodies as he played.

## **Duke began his career performing at his high school dances.**

Soon Duke began playing for his high school dances. He even composed his own songs like "Soda Fountain Rag." When he was 19, he started playing at parties, dance halls and other venues. He liked to wear flashy clothes and slick his hair back to impress the ladies in the audience.

## **How did Duke become a bandleader and composer?**

Duke then moved to New York where performers were in demand. There, he played in different jazz clubs, saloons and dance halls. Soon he was leading his own band, the Washingtonians at The Kentucky Club, located in Times Square. Even at this early stage, musicians and music critics were noticing that Ellington's music was different. In 1927, after getting a gig at the Cotton Club, the hottest jazz spot in Harlem, he began to produce sophisticated arrangements of his own.

## **Duke's music impressed audiences all over the world.**

Duke Ellington and His Orchestra played at the Cotton Club for eleven years, though the band took off frequently to tour around the country, and to make movies in Hollywood. Audiences tuned in nightly to listen to live broadcasts of the band on the radio. His years at the club led to a long, successful career. Duke toured the world with his orchestra and composed thousands of songs.

## **Duke was a brilliant composer and musician.**

Duke had his own series of Carnegie Hall concerts starting in 1943 and wrote some his best music for them. They were known as his "extended compositions", which means that they were much longer (sometimes 45 minutes) than most of his other music. Some people have said that his orchestra was his instrument because of the original and beautiful music he composed for it, but he always remained a great jazz piano player.

## **Duke earned the Presidential Medal of Freedom.**

In addition to writing jazz songs, he also composed ballets, musicals, film scores, and more. In 1969, President Nixon gave Ellington a 70th birthday party at The White House, and honored Duke by giving him the Presidential Medal of Freedom. This honor was fitting for a man who maintained a career for half a century based on self-expression, integrity and individuality.

Name \_\_\_\_\_



## Duke Ellington Test

1. What type of genre is this reading?  
A. fiction      B. fantasy      C. non-fiction      D. historical fiction
2. Who gave Edward Kennedy Ellington the nickname, Duke?  
A. His parents      B. His classmate      C. His sister      D. Harvey Brooks
3. When Duke was in elementary school, what activity did he enjoy doing?  
A. baseball      B. piano      C. orchestra      D. go to dances
4. Who inspired Duke to want to start playing the piano again?  
A. His parents      B. His classmate      C. His sister      D. Harvey Brooks
5. What was different about his music?  
A. He played only Classical music.  
B. He changed rules and expressed freely.  
C. He only wrote short pieces of music.  
D. He wore flashy clothes.
6. What happened first in the following events?  
A. He wrote for Carnegie Hall.      B. He performed for the high school.  
C. He quit his lessons.      D. He met a waiter who took him to see ragtime.
7. What was the name of his band?  
A. Washingtonians      B. Kentucky Club      C. Cotton Band      D. Duke's band
8. How old was Duke when he began producing sophisticated arrangements of his own?  
A. 19      B. 34      C. 22      D. 28
9. How was Duke's band able to spread their music to people all over the world?  
A. live broadcasts on TV      B. downloads from Internet  
C. live broadcasts on the radio      D. play at local clubs in Washington

10. What are "extended compositions"?
- A. much louder than other music
  - B. another name for ragtime
  - C. much longer than other music
  - D. another name for different arrangements
11. Why did President Nixon honor him with the Presidential Medal of Freedom?
- A. for helping others free from slavery
  - B. for being the first African American musician
  - C. for playing music for 70 years
  - D. for expressing freely in music pieces
12. What happened second in the following events?
- A. He toured the world.
  - B. He made movies.
  - C. He met Harvey Brooks.
  - D. He composed the song, "Soda Fountain Rag."

13-18 Use the following word letter to the correct dates in the timeline:

- A. Duke passed away.
- B. Duke played at dance halls.
- C. Edward was born.
- D. He plays at the Cotton Club
- E. He is invited to the White House.
- F. Duke played his own music at Carnegie Hall.

1899      1918      1927      1943      1969      1974

\_\_\_\_\_

19. What does the expression "he practiced until his fingers could fly" mean?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

20. From the reading, what can you infer about Duke Ellington's character?

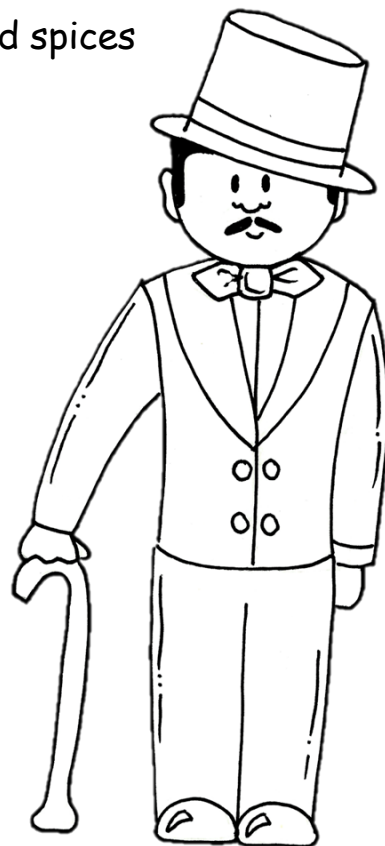
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Name \_\_\_\_\_

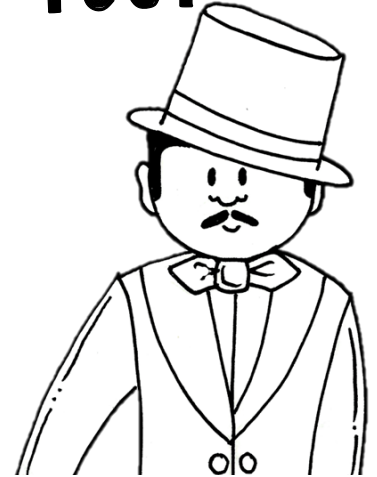
## Duke Ellington Vocabulary Words

1. ragtime- a type of jazz music with an irregular rhythm
2. melodies- pleasing tunes
3. jazz- a type of music with complex melodies that was started in the U.S.
4. orchestra- a large group of musicians who play different instruments together
5. improvise- to make up something as you go along
6. blues- sad feelings
7. heritage- something that is handed down from past generations
8. jambalaya- a spicy stew made with rice, meat, fish, and spices
9. stride- to walk or run in long steps
10. lilt- playing in a lively, cheerful manner
11. swanky- expensive and showy
12. cuttin' the rug- dancing
13. notions- ideas
14. maestro- a master in music
15. crude- lack of perfection



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# Duke Ellington Vocabulary Test



|         |          |                 |           |
|---------|----------|-----------------|-----------|
| ragtime | melodies | orchestra       | improvise |
| blues   | heritage | jambalaya       | swanky    |
| maestro | stride   | cuttin' the rug | notions   |

1. The members of the \_\_\_\_\_ practiced for their recital.
2. I forgot the rest of the piece I was playing, so I had to \_\_\_\_\_ some music.
3. Clara says that when it rains outside, sometimes she gets the \_\_\_\_\_.
4. At the party we went to the dance floor and were \_\_\_\_\_ to the music.
5. Eduardo wrote an essay celebrating his Mexican \_\_\_\_\_.
6. We can't afford to go to that \_\_\_\_\_ place!
7. The \_\_\_\_\_ that I ordered in the restaurant is so spicy!
8. Duke became a \_\_\_\_\_ in jazz.
9. The track star had a \_\_\_\_\_ that made him run faster than lightning!
10. Why did Duke's parents have different \_\_\_\_\_ for him when he was playing baseball?
11. \_\_\_\_\_ is what folks called the music that turned umpy-dump into a soul- rousing romp.
12. The radio stations played many \_\_\_\_\_ by famous jazz composers.