Harvey B. Gantt Center
for African-American Arts+Culture

Jazz Greats:
Classic Photographs from the
Bank of America Collection



Walkthrough

Student Guide

Use this student guide to enhance your experience in *Jazz Greats: Classic Photographs from the Bank of America Collection* and learn about yourself along the way.

Exhibition on View
November 7, 2025 – April 26, 2026

About the Exhibition

The images in *Jazz Greats: Classic Photographs from the Bank of America Collection* offer a clear view of music and movement, captured with professional skill and insight. This selection of black-and-white photos spans three generations, reflecting the histories of individuals and events both in front of and behind the camera. Jazz has traditionally been at the forefront of African American music for its honesty, sensuality, and improvisational energy. Chuck Stewart's portraits of famous saxophone players Eric Dolphy and John Coltrane reveal candid and serious moments off stage. A reflective mood fills Ed (Eduard) van der Elsken's dark 1958 portrait of Louis Armstrong, dressed formally with his trumpet lowered, taken during his performance at the Newport Jazz Festival that year.

This exhibition showcases 33 photographs by fourteen photographers, ranging from the 1920s to the 1980s, highlighting artists from various genres in music and dance. Many are legends of the distinctly American art forms of jazz and modern dance; some are simply members of local communities entertaining their neighbors.

BACKGROUND ARTWORK CREDIT William Gottlieb (American, 1917–2006), *Dizzy Gillespie, 52nd St., New York, N.Y.*, c. 1948, Gelatin silver print, Bank of America Collection



Photo ©Tyrus Ortega Gaines Photography.

Before Your Visit

After reading about the exhibition, answer the following questions.

1. What is jazz?

2. When you listen to jazz, what do you hear? What emotion do you feel?

Jazz's Historic Background

The roots of jazz can be traced back to African musical traditions brought to the Americas through the African diaspora. These traditions emphasized rhythm, call-and-response, movement, and communal expression. During the 18th and 19th centuries, enslaved Africans and their descendants blended these traditions with European musical elements, such as instruments and harmony. In places like Congo Square in New Orleans, music and dance became powerful forms of cultural preservation and resistance. These early expressions laid the groundwork for blues, spirituals, and eventually jazz as a uniquely American art form.

Exploring Music, Community, and Cultural Change Through the Decades



1940s - 1950s

Bebop and hard bop grow in popularity

Jazz moves from big band dance music to small groups focused on fast improvisation and personal expression.



1954

Brown v. Board of Education ruling ends legal school segregation

The Civil Rights Movement gains strength. Many jazz musicians support calls for racial equality.



1955 - 1960

Miles Davis and John Coltrane begin shaping new jazz styles

Their music focuses on emotional depth and musical exploration.



1960 - 1965

The Civil Rights Movement grows

Jazz musicians perform at events, write music inspired by the movement, and use their platform to speak out. Events like sit-ins, marches, groundbreaking speeches by MLK Jr., and the March on Washington set the tone for this time. Jazz artists support the push for equality and songs become symbols of hope and protest.



1965 - 1970s

The Black Arts Movement

Black poets, musicians, dancers, and artists work to celebrate and define Black identity. Jazz is a major part of this cultural expression.

Early 1970s

The birth of jazz fusion

Jazz blends with rock, funk, soul, and electric instruments. Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock, and others lead this evolution.



Mid 1970s

Growth of Black cultural centers, arts organizations, and jazz education

Communities begin intentionally preserving jazz as cultural heritage.



Late 1970s

Jazz and music festivals and international tours increase

Jazz becomes a global language, performed and celebrated around the world.



1980s

Honoring jazz legends

Jazz legends such as Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and Miles Davis were widely recognized for shaping American music and culture. Their influence continued to inspire new artists and keep jazz traditions alive.



1990s

Jazz reimagined

Jazz gained renewed interest as musicians and audiences revisited its sound, style, and creativity. Jazz became a powerful way to tell stories, express identity, and connect generations through music.



Image Credits

1940s - 1950s: William Gottlieb, *Portrait of Dizzy Gillespie, New York, N.Y., ca. May 1947*, 1947, via Wikimedia Commons, marked as public domain.

1954: Thomas J O'Halloran, *School integration. Barnard School, Washington, D.C.*, 1955, via LOC.gov, marked as public domain.

1955 - 1960: Unknown Photographer, *Miles Davis, Cannonball Adderley and John Coltrane*, 1958, via Wikimedia Commons, marked as public domain.

1960 - 1965: Unknown Photographer, *Civil rights march on Washington, D.C.*, 1963, via Picryl.com, marked as public domain.

1965 - 1970s: Lemvo Jean Abou Bakar Depara, *Orchestra OK Jazz à Léopoldville de 1955 à 1965*, c. 1955-1965, via Wikimedia Commons, marked as public domain.

Early 1970s: Jean-Pierre Roche, *Miles Davis*, 1971, via Wikimedia Commons, marked as public domain.

Mid 1970s: Unknown Photographer, *New Orleans Jazz Fest 1975 - Jambalaya Trad Band*, 1975, Picryl.com, marked as public domain.

Late 1970s: Unknown Photographer, *New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival*, 1976, via Picryl.com, marked as public domain.

1980s: Jazzenthusiast, *Louis Hayes Avery Sharpe McCoy Tyner*, c. 1985, via Wikimedia Commons, marked as public domain.

1990s: Infrogmation of New Orleans, *Pud Brown and Trombones*, 1996, via Wikimedia Commons, marked as public domain.

Capturing the Jazz Era: Music, Culture, and Photography



William Gottlieb (American, 1917–2006), *Dizzy Gillespie, 52nd St., New York, N.Y.*, c. 1948, Gelatin silver print, Bank of America Collection

The *Jazz Greats* exhibition spans from the 1920s to the 1980s, showcasing various musical and cultural styles and emphasizing the evolution of jazz. This photo of the legendary trumpeter, bandleader, and composer Dizzy Gillespie was taken in 1948. While images in this exhibit feature musicians or communities connected to jazz, they also reflect the style, technology, culture, and mood of their respective eras.

1. When you look at the photographs in the exhibition, what do you observe about how the images change over time?

2. What can the quality, style, or appearance of each photograph reveal about the decade in which it was taken?

3. Which photograph in the exhibition stands out to you the most? How does it stand out? Why?

The Freedom of Expression and Art





ARTWORK CREDIT (FROM LEFT TO RIGHT)

William Gottlieb (American, 1917–2006), *Ella Fitzgerald, Dizzy Gillespie, Ray Brown, Milt (Milton) Jackson, and Timmie Rosenkrantz, Downbeat, New York, N.Y.*, 1947, Gelatin silver print, Bank of America Collection

William Gottlieb (American, 1917–2006), *Django Reinhardt*, c. 1950, Gelatin silver print, Bank of America Collection

Based on the photos above and the exhibition, what do you think the musician is trying to express with their music?

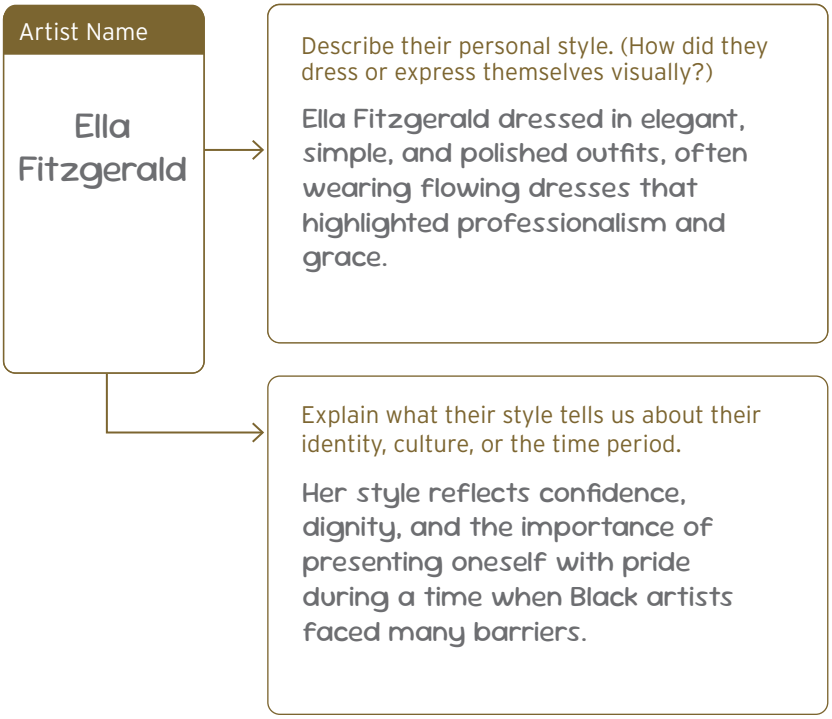
Identify 4 to 5 emotions depicted in the photographs above or in the exhibition.

Jazz Artists and Their Cultural Expression

Jazz musicians not only created new sounds, but also formed a culture that expressed who they were through music, clothing, personality, and performance style. Choose 2 jazz artists from the exhibition or your research and use the following charts to write about what you learned.

Examples: Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Sarah Vaughan, Mary Lou Williams, Duke Ellington

Sample Chart:



Artist Name

Describe their personal style. (How did they dress or express themselves visually?)

Explain what their style tells us about their identity, culture, or the time period.

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After the Visit: Sense of Community + Reflection

The photographs of Apollo and 52nd Street capture key locations in jazz history. The Apollo Theater in Harlem was a vital stage where many Black musicians first gained recognition and shared their music with large crowds. Meanwhile, 52nd Street in New York City was known as "Swing Street," packed with jazz clubs where musicians gathered late into the night to play, experiment, and learn from each other. These spaces were more than just performance venues; they served as community hubs where artists built friendships, created new sounds, and shaped jazz culture together.

ARTWORK CREDIT (FROM LEFT TO RIGHT)

William Gottlieb (American, 1917–2006), *Apollo*, c. 1950, Bank of America Collection

William Gottlieb (American, 1917–2006), *52nd Street*, c. 1950, Bank of America Collection





1. How do you think venues like the Apollo Theater and 52nd Street helped musicians feel connected to each other and to their community?

2. What spaces or places give you a feeling of safety or community?

3. What might it have been like to be at the Apollo Theater or 52nd Street during the peak of the jazz era?

4. How are these places similar or different compared to places we currently build community? Draw a space that feels like community to you today.

5. After reviewing the timeline on pages 4 & 5, what caught your attention or taught you something new about jazz?

BACKGROUND ARTWORK CREDIT William Gottlieb (American, 1917–2006), *52nd Street*, c. 1950, Bank of America Collection

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FRONT COVER ARTWORK CREDIT William Gottlieb (American, 1917–2006), *Ella Fitzgerald, Dizzy Gillespie, Ray Brown, Milt (Milton) Jackson, and Timmie Rosenkrantz, Downbeat, New York, N.Y.*, 1947, Gelatin silver print, Bank of America Collection