



project.org

STUDENT HANDOUT

GREEN LEVEL
MORE SUPPORT

The Sound of Harlem

Grades 5–8 • Music

ADMIT ONE

NAME

DATE

CLASS

Big idea: Jazz was born in the early 1900s and became the soundtrack of the Harlem Renaissance. It mixed African musical traditions (call-and-response, rhythm, improvisation) with American instruments and city energy. Listening carefully to jazz can tell you a lot about how it works — and what it means.

PART 1

O1

Listening response: listen to one jazz recording

Your teacher will play a recording. As you listen, fill in this response:

Title / Artist:

1. List at least three instruments you can hear:

2. Circle the words that describe the mood of this music:

Joyful

Sad

Energetic

Peaceful

Powerful

Playful

Serious

Mysterious

3. Does the music feel like it's talking to you — or like it's having a conversation with itself? Explain:

PART 2

O2

Call-and-response

Call-and-response is when one musical voice “calls” and another “answers.” It comes from African music and American work songs.

4. Can you hear call-and-response in the recording? Which instruments are “calling” and “answering”?

5. Name one other place in your life where you hear call-and-response:

03

PART 3

The 12-bar blues: the pattern behind the music

The 12-bar blues is a repeating 12-bar musical pattern. Almost every early jazz and blues song uses it. The pattern uses three chords (I, IV, V) — the Roman numerals just mean “first,” “fourth,” and “fifth” notes of the scale.

12-BAR BLUES PATTERN (KEY OF C)

Bar 1 C (I)	Bar 2 C (I)	Bar 3 C (I)	Bar 4 C (I)
Bar 5 F (IV)	Bar 6 F (IV)	Bar 7 C (I)	Bar 8 C (I)
Bar 9 G (V)	Bar 10 F (IV)	Bar 11 C (I)	Bar 12 G (V)

6. Why do you think musicians liked this repeating pattern? What does it allow them to do?

Aaron Douglas — Song of the Towers, 1934

7. Aaron Douglas painted *Song of the Towers* about Harlem and its music. What do you think he was seeing or feeling?

MINI MUSEUM CONNECTION

The **Jazz Lab** in the exhibition lets you layer different jazz instruments to build a full band sound. Try removing one instrument at a time — which one changes the feel of the music most?

minimuseumproject.org/exhibitions/harlem-renaissance