

Thelonious Monk



Lesson Plan

OBJECTIVE: *To better understand and appreciate the contributions of Thelonious Monk to the history of North Carolina and the United States.*

Social Studies Objectives: 9.02

Social Studies Skills: 1, 2, 3, 5

Language Arts Objectives: 1.03, 1.04, 2.01, 5.01, 6.01, 6.02

Resources / Materials

- Biographical sketch
- Internet access (optional)
- *Activities* page
- Menu of Activities for North Carolina African American Musicians

Procedures

- Students will read and discuss biographical sketch of Thelonious Monk either as a whole class or in groups. Reading can also be done independently.
- Students will complete *Activities* page as designated by the teacher.
- Students will complete one or more projects in the "Menu of Activities for North Carolina African American Musicians" as designated by the teacher.

Evaluation

- Student participation in reading and discussion of Thelonious Monk
- Student performance on the *Activities* page
- Student participation in the "Menu of Activities for North Carolina African American Musicians"

Bibliography

Monk, Thelonious. *Encarta Online Encyclopedia* 2003. 9 March 2003.

<http://encarta.msn.com/> Search for "Thelonious Monk"

"Thelonious Monk." *The Thelonious Monk Website*. 9 March 2003.

<http://home.achilles.net/~howardm/tsmonk/tsmonk.php>

"Thelonious Monk." *MSN Entertainment-Music: Thelonious Monk*. 9 March 2003.

<http://entertainment.msn.com/Artist/Default.aspx?artist=101552>

Thelonious Monk



Biographical Sketch

Thelonious Monk was an American jazz pianist and composer who was born in 1917, in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. He was part of a select group of jazz musicians who were responsible for the birth of a new kind of jazz called bebop.

Thelonious grew up in New York City and started playing piano when he was around 5 years old. His first job was touring as an accompanist to an evangelist. In his teens, he met Mary Lou Williams, a jazz pianist who became a lifelong friend and a major inspiration. In the early 1940s, Monk was playing Harlem clubs like Minton's and Monroe's Uptown House with fellow musicians Kenny Clarke, Dizzy Gillespie, and Charlie Parker. In the mid-1940s, Monk led groups under his own name and developed his own individual style. His audience failed to understand his music and criticized him. Unfortunately, his work was neglected by the public for a decade before he was acclaimed as a genius.

His compositions were so advanced that many people thought he was an inferior pianist and assumed that he was crazy. Fortunately, Alfred Lion of the Blue Note Recording Company believed in Monk and recorded him. Monk also contracted with

other recording companies. During this period of the early 1950s, he had to struggle to meet his financial obligations. However, his fortunes slowly began to improve in the mid-to-late 1950s when he signed with another recording company. Monk was persuaded to record an album featuring Duke Ellington tunes. Monk recorded other albums and was booked into a club. In the club he used a quartet that featured North Carolinian tenor-saxophonist John Coltrane. The critics finally recognized Thelonious Monk's greatness during this important gig. His unique style turned him into a celebrity, and his star-status did not change for the remainder of his career. In 1962, he appeared on the cover of *Time Magazine*, and he continued performing through the early 1970s. Suddenly, in 1973, he retired. Monk was suffering from mental illness, and for most of the remaining part of his life, he lived in seclusion.

The music of Thelonious Monk established him as one of the leading composers of jazz. Many of his works have become jazz classics. After his death in 1982, many artists honored Thelonious Monk by recording different versions of his songs. Despite attempts to recreate his style, there was no one who could imitate the original jazz music of Thelonious Monk.

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Activities

Personal Response

Many people thought that Monk was an inferior pianist because they did not understand his advanced compositions. What are some character traits that Monk probably possessed to overcome the criticisms?

Analyzing Biographical Information

1. What type of jazz did Monk help develop?
2. Explain why Monk's work was neglected for a decade before he was acclaimed as a musical genius.
3. Describe why critics finally recognized Monk's greatness.

Interpreting Meaning

Directions: Find the term in the passage. Use context clues and/or the dictionary to understand the term. Select a term for each analogy. Write the term in the blank.

Terms: celebrity, composer, compositions, evangelist, decade, acclaim, inferior, gig

1. Author is to book as a _____ is to music.
2. Books are to authors as _____ are to composers.
3. A teacher is to school as an _____ is to a church or congregation.
4. 60 seconds is to a minute as ten years is to a _____.
5. A _____ is to fame as a criminal is to infamous.
6. Superior is to top-notch work as _____ is to poor or below average work.
7. Praise is to _____ as shame is to disapproval.
8. Gift is to present as _____ is to a paid musical performance.

Creative Responses

1. Select one of the activities from the "Menu of North Carolina African American Musicians" to complete.

2. NCFMP: Mary Lou Williams, the innovative pianist and composer who taught at Duke University as an Artist-in-Residence from 1977 until her death in 1981, is mentioned here as a lifelong friend to Thelonius Monk. Many others also supported Monk, despite his maverick status as a musician. The freedom to create something new, something that's never been heard or seen before, involves taking huge risks—of rejection, criticism, and loneliness.

What other African Americans from North Carolina would you commemorate on the Freedom Monument for their willingness to break down barriers and risk rejection? What symbols would you use to illustrate their pioneering courage and the consequences of their efforts?

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Activities ■ Answer Key for Teachers

Personal Response

Many people thought that Monk was an inferior pianist because they did not understand his advanced compositions. What are some character traits that Monk probably possessed to overcome the criticisms?

Responses will vary and can serve as a springboard for discussion.

Analyzing Biographical Information

1. What type of jazz did Monk help develop?

Monk helped develop the bebop kind of jazz.

2. Explain why Monk's work was neglected for a decade before he was acclaimed as a musical genius.

Monk suffered a decade of neglect because people did not understand his music.

3. Describe why critics finally recognized Monk's greatness.

Critics finally recognized Monk's greatness during his gig with a quartet that featured North Carolina tenor-saxophonist John Coltrane.

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Responses will vary.