



Mini-Lesson: Inspirations

OVERVIEW

Theofanidis told the Betsy Ross Arts Magnet School Band that “King” Oliver, an important figure in the early history of jazz, had a part to play in *Sweet like that*.

LEARNING GOAL

Students will learn more about “King” Oliver, early jazz music, and find out what inspired Theofanidis.

MATERIALS & RESOURCES

- Copies of the “King” Oliver article, [Sweet Like This & Sweet like that](#) for students
- Copies of the [“King” Oliver Crossword Puzzle](#) and [Answer Key](#)
- Questions on the board:
 - Who was “King” Oliver?
 - What were some of his contributions to American music?
 - Can you identify any events that occurred during Oliver’s lifetime?
 - What is a famous invention attributed to “King” Oliver?
 - Where did Christopher Theofanidis get the title, *Sweet like that*?

PROCESS

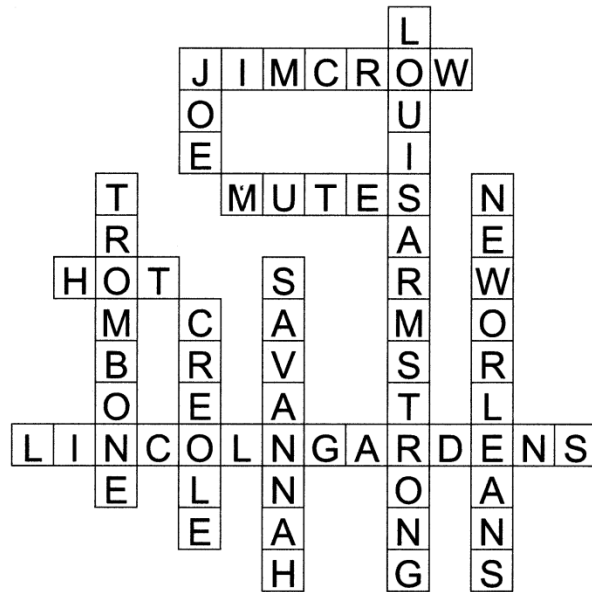
1. Read the article “*Sweet like this & Sweet like that!*” out loud in class. (Assign designated readers.)
2. Organize into small groups to respond to the questions in a group discussion.
3. Reconvene and ask students to discuss what they learned. Use the questions on the board to prompt the discussion.
4. Use the “King” Oliver Crossword Puzzle to assess what students know about this jazz great.

EXTENSIONS

Here are resources that provide more about “King” Oliver for students who want to know more, or to use for independent research.

- Joe “King” Oliver, entry at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joe_%22King%22_Oliver
- Learn more about “King” Oliver website for the Ken Burns JAZZ documentary at http://www.pbs.org/jazz/biography/artist_id_oliver_joe_king.htm. Includes audio samples.
- Read another King Oliver bio at <http://www.ukapologetics.net/tango/theking.htm>
- Listen to “Sweet Like This” or buy the track at <http://www.jazz.com/music/2009/3/25/king-oliver-and-his-orchestra-sweet-like-this>
- More about Jim Crow and discrimination in the south at *The History of Jim Crow*, <http://www.jimcrowshistory.org/home.htm>. The site was originally created in support of the PBS series *The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow*, produced by Thirteen/WNET New York. The series aired in 2002 and was praised by both critics and historians. It also won a Peabody Award. The resources include many Language Arts and Social Studies lesson plans and classroom resources.

"KING" OLIVER CROSSWORD ANSWER KEY



SWEET LIKE THIS & SWEET LIKE THAT!

WHO WAS "KING" OLIVER?



Christopher Theofanidis likes the jazz melody *Sweet like this* by "King" Oliver. He likes it so much that it was one of the inspirations for *Sweet like that*. Who was "King Oliver" and why is he an important figure in the history of jazz?

Joe "King" Oliver was a jazz trombone and cornet player and bandleader in the early days of jazz. He was born in the small town of Aben, Louisiana in 1885, but moved to New Orleans as a young man. Joe Oliver made his way playing in New Orleans brass bands, dance bands, and private clubs. Working closely with trombone player, Kid Ory, he developed a jazz band and a sound that was considered the hottest and best in New Orleans.

Oliver was a big success in New Orleans, performing for audiences all over town. One night he and the band would be working at a debutante ball, and the next playing in a working-class dance hall. But in 1919 a fight broke out in one of the dance halls as his band played. Oliver and all his band members were arrested. This incident caused Joe Oliver to leave the south and its Jim Crow laws behind forever. (After the Civil War and Reconstruction, new laws and rules were put into effect. They took away many of the rights granted to African-Americans through the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments. These

discriminatory laws were called Jim Crow laws.)

By 1922, Oliver ended up in Chicago. That is where he formed the Creole Jazz Band. The band often played at Lincoln Gardens where people loved the music so much they called him Chicago's Jazz King.

Many of early jazz greats were members of Oliver's band, including Louis Armstrong. Early recordings from the early twenties are performed in a New Orleans style of Dixieland jazz, featuring collective improvisation delivered with great artistry. This style became known as "hot jazz."



Left to right, Honoré Dutrey (trombone), Baby Dodds (drums), "King" Oliver (standing), Lil Harden (piano), William Manuel Johnson (banjo), Johnny Dodds (clarinet), and Louis Armstrong (in front)

But through the 1920s, as the Creole Jazz Band played for larger audiences, their music evolved and transformed the earlier jazz style. They eventually developed a hybrid of the old New Orleans style and popular dance band music. In 1926, the band was renamed "King Oliver and His Dixie Syncopators." They were a huge hit.

"King" Oliver was always trying out ways to change the sound of his horn. He would place

Cont.





different objects in the bell as he blew. Items such as a plumber's plunger, his derby hat, bottles, cups, and even buckets were used as mutes to alter the tone color. He pioneered the use of mutes as a way to make jazz instruments sound unique; often like human voices. Oliver's recording of *WaWaWa* with the Dixie Syncopators provided a name for the muted sound, the "wah-wah."

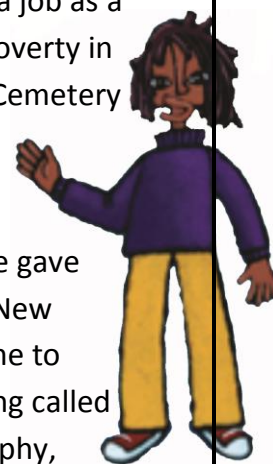
He composed many pieces now considered jazz standards; *Sweet Like This*, *Dipper Mouth Blues*, and *Canal Street Blues*.

Oliver was a great musician but a poor businessman. His managers often stole his money. They demanded high fees for performances, higher than the venues could pay. Oliver lost gigs at places like the Savoy Ballroom and the Cotton Club in New York City. (Young Duke Ellington took the Cotton Club job and became famous!) When the Great Depression came at the end of the 1920s, his bank collapsed and Oliver lost his life savings. He struggled to keep a band together, but the huge financial losses led to a band breakup in Savannah, Georgia.

Oliver stayed in Savannah and took a job as a Recreation Hall janitor. He died in poverty in 1938 and was buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in Bronx, NY.

Oliver is also remembered as Louis Armstrong's teacher and mentor. He gave young Armstrong his first cornet in New Orleans and later invited him to come to Chicago and join the band. Armstrong called Oliver, "Papa Joe." In his autobiography, *Satchmo - My Life in New Orleans*, Armstrong said this about Oliver:

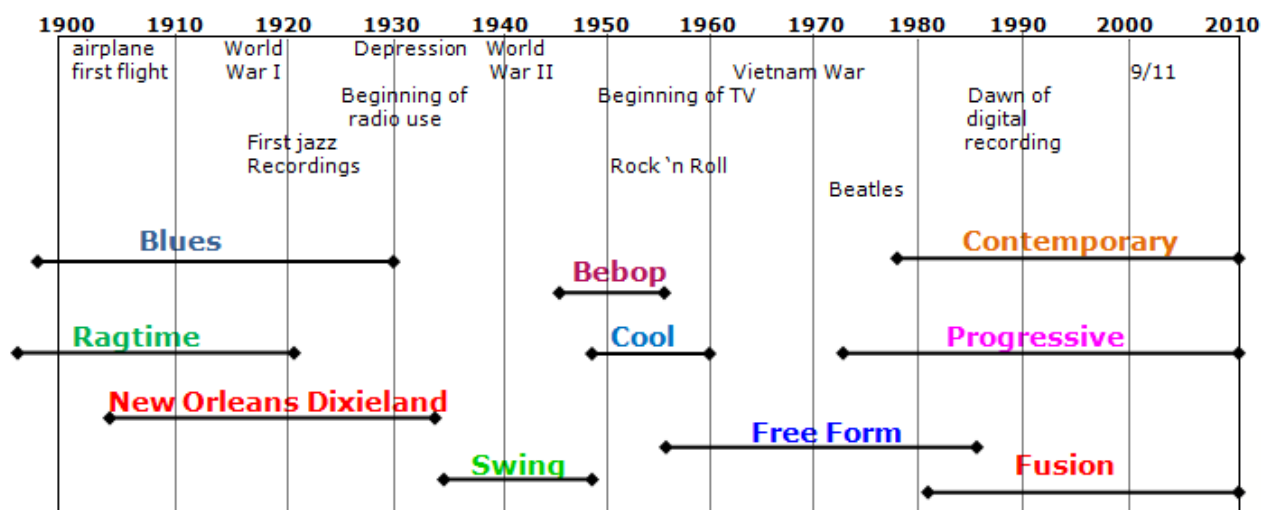
"It was my ambition to play as he did. I still think that if it had not been for Joe Oliver, jazz would not be what it is today. He was a creator in his own right."



WHAT TO KNOW MORE?

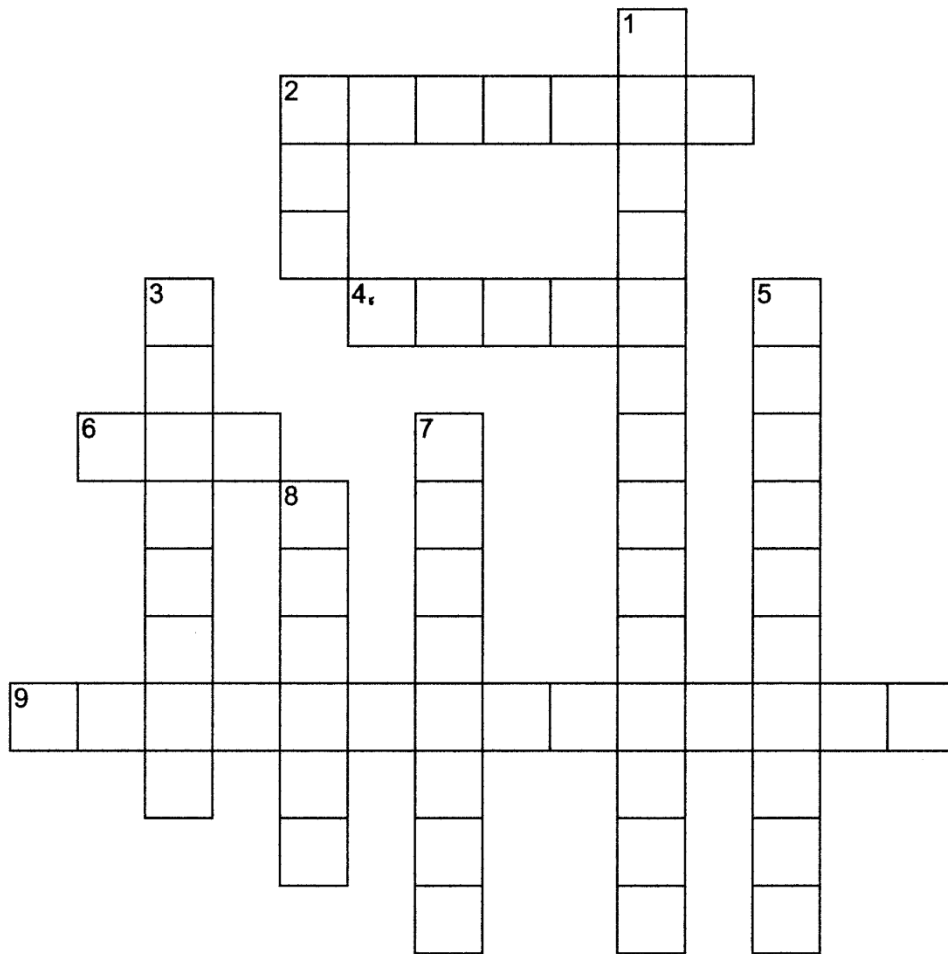
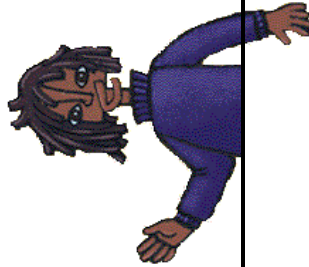
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Jazz Styles through the 20th Century



Name _____

"KING" OLIVER CROSSWORD PUZZLE



www.Puzzle-Maker.com

ACROSS

- 2 Discriminatory laws
- 4 Oliver experimented with ___ to change instrument tone
- 6 The band played ___ jazz
- 9 Where band played

DOWN

- 1 Oliver's famous trumpet player
- 2 King Oliver first name
- 3 Oliver's instrument
- 5 Oliver's home town
- 7 End of the road for Oliver
- 8 Name of Chicago band, ___ Jazz Band