

## Lesson Plan: Similes Activity using Jazz (featuring Duke Ellington)

- **Target Audience:** ESOL or BL class using a communicative approach with jazz music. This activity involves listening, speaking, writing and reading language skills. (Level 4+)
- **Goal:** Students will listen to and be able to write about jazz music using similes.
- **Objectives:** Students will be able to describe what jazz music is, provide an overview of a famous jazz musician and compare objects or concepts using “like” or “as.”
- **Class time:** 1.5 hours
- **Materials:**
  - Separate cards with the colors red, yellow, blue, orange, purple and green.
  - *ReadWorks* “Jazz Music” article (Handout 1)
  - Who is Duke Ellington? (Handout 2)
  - “Easy as Pie” Worksheet (Handout 3)
  - “Similes” Worksheet (Handout 4)
  - Duke Ellington Recording and CD Player. (The song is available on CD from Paula and Rose.)

**Note:** This activity can be used with any jazz music and artist that you choose. Use this lesson as a model.

### Lesson Flow:

1. **Hold up** the cards with the colors red, yellow and blue. Ask students what would happen if you mixed the red with yellow (get orange-hold up orange card). Ask what happens when you mix blue and red (get purple-hold up purple card). Ask what happens when you mix blue and yellow (get green-hold up green card). Just like two separate colors can become a totally new color, jazz music can be the same way.
2. **Ask** students what jazz music is. Tell students that jazz musicians are masters at mixing different instruments’ sounds like an artist mixes colors.
3. **Ask** for volunteers to read aloud the *ReadWorks* “Jazz Music” article, p. 1. (Student Handout 1). Highlight any new vocabulary. Discuss the meaning of “improvise” as defined in the article, p. 2.  
**Optional:** Ask students to complete the comprehension questions found on the last page of the article, p.3.
4. **Ask** students if they are familiar with Duke Ellington. Who is he? Why is he famous? Do they know anything else about him?
5. **Ask** for volunteers to read aloud about Duke Ellington. (Student Handout 2)
6. **Introduce** the concept of similes. Ask for a volunteer to read the definition of a simile on Student Handout 2. A simile is a phrase or figure of speech that compares two things using the words **like** or **as**. Say that similes are a tool for descriptive writing. Shortly you will be using similes to describe jazz music by Duke Ellington.
7. **Complete** the simile worksheets, “Easy as Pie” (Student Handout 3) and “Similes” (Student Handout 4) for more practice.
8. **Listen** to the music by Duke Ellington.
9. **Ask** students to write as many similes as they can to describe the music that they are listening to. Tell them that they can “improvise.” Put the following prompts on the white board to help them get started:  
The music is as smooth *as* butter.  
The rhythm is *like* \_\_\_\_\_.  
When I listen, the music sounds like \_\_\_\_\_.
10. **Conclude** the lesson by asking students to read aloud the similes that they have come up with to describe the music that they listened to.

## Student Handout 1: Jazz Music *by ReadWorks*



Jazz music was one of the first American styles of music. It first started being played in the early 1900s. It was first played by African American musicians in the city of New Orleans. Jazz music grew out of ragtime, blues, and other kinds of music.

So, what does it sound like? It's hard to give an answer that fits all jazz music. But there are some things found in jazz that are not often found in other kinds of music.

One thing that sets jazz apart is that it often has improvisation. Improvisation is when musicians make their parts up on the spot. Sometimes in a jazz song, there is a section where someone can improvise a solo. The rest of the musicians play quietly in the background. Then, they trade. Someone else can then improvise their part.

Jazz also can have a syncopated beat. A syncopated beat is a beat that doesn't fall exactly where you think it will. Some beats feel a bit longer. Others feel a bit shorter. This can make some jazz music have a swingy feeling.

Jazz musicians also have a certain way of playing. They bring their own style to the music. So do jazz singers. For example, they may scoop up to hit notes, or play around with the melody.

Jazz is a very special type of music. Listen to a jazz song. What do you hear that makes it special?

---

**improvise** im · pro · vise

### Advanced Definition

#### transitive verb

1. to create or provide without preparation or practice, esp. in music, speech, or writing.

*She didn't have time to prepare a speech, so she improvised one.*

*He didn't have his music with him, so he just improvised something.*

2. to construct or compose from whatever materials are available or handy.

*We improvised a shelter using fallen branches.*

#### intransitive verb

1. to meet the needs of the moment by creating, saying, or doing something in a spontaneous, unplanned way.

*It was a tough question that she didn't have a ready-made answer for, so she had to improvise.*

2. to compose new music in the act of playing it.

*They start out playing as the music is written, then they improvise.*

### Spanish cognate

*improvisar*. The Spanish word *improvisar* means improvise.

### These are some examples of how the word or forms of the word are used:

1. "Then start improvising!" Lina's mom told her. "Jazz is all about improvising.
2. They used old blankets and tarps from the truck to create improvised beds. The four companions looked at each other, unsure what to do next.
3. She also learned how to sing harmony and improvise with other students. As Alana learned how to be a better singer, she learned different techniques.
4. "The only way you're going to learn how to improvise is if you try," she told her daughter. She walked over to the piano and pulled out the bench.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Jazz music was one of the first American styles of music. Who first played jazz music?

- A. It was first played by Native American musicians in the city of New Orleans.
- B. It was first played by European musicians in the city of New Orleans.
- C. It was first played by African American musicians in the city of New Orleans.

2. The text compares Jazz music to other kinds of music. According to the text, what is one way Jazz music is different from other kinds of music?

- A. Jazz is made using instruments.
- B. Jazz has singing.
- C. Jazz has improvisation.

3. Read the following sentences from the text:

One thing that sets jazz apart is that it often has improvisation.

Improvisation is when musicians make their parts up on the spot...

Jazz musicians also have a certain way of playing. They bring their own style to the music. So do jazz singers. For example, they may scoop up to hit notes, or play around with the melody.

What does this information tell us about musicians who create jazz music?

- A. They can be free to use their creativity and style to make jazz music.
- B. They have to follow strict rules about how they make jazz music.
- C. They have a hard time playing jazz with other musicians.

4. Jazz can have a syncopated beat. Based on information in the text, how can a syncopated beat best be described?

- A. loud
- B. boring
- C. unpredictable

5. What is the main idea of the text?

- A. Jazz music was first played by African American musicians in the city of New Orleans, and grew out of ragtime, blues, and other kinds of music.
- B. Jazz is a very special type of music that can have improvisation, syncopated beats, and notes that reflect the style of the jazz musicians and singers that make the music.
- C. Sometimes in a jazz song, there is a section where someone can improvise a solo while the rest of the musicians play quietly in the background before they switch roles.

## Student Handout 2

### Who is Duke Ellington?



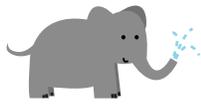
Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington was born April 29, 1899, in Washington, D.C. A major figure in the history of jazz music, his career spanned more than half a century. He was an American composer, pianist and Big Band leader. He composed thousands of songs and created one of the most distinctive sounds in jazz music. He continued to play what he called "American Music" until shortly before his death in 1974.

## Student Handout 3

# Easy as Pie

Use the pictures as clues to complete each **simile**.

A **simile** is a phrase or figure of speech that compares two things using the words **like** or **as**.



elephant



bee



bat



feather



desert



tree

1. I'm so thirsty, my mouth is as dry as a \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Without her glasses on, Judy felt as blind as a \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The baby kitten is as light as a \_\_\_\_\_.
4. I was as busy as a \_\_\_\_\_ as I worked to finish my homework.
5. My older brother is as tall as a \_\_\_\_\_.
6. If my dog keeps eating so much, he'll become as big as an \_\_\_\_\_.

Now make up your own simile!

---

---

## Student Handout 4

# Similes

A simile is a phrase or figure of speech that compares two things using the words like or as. Compare things in an interesting or unexpected way that creates an image for the reader using "like" or "as" to compare something to a seemingly dissimilar noun, verb or adjective  
Examples: "She is as strong as an ox," or "he was as quiet as a mouse."

**Pattern 1:** "like"  
verb + like + noun

Examples

She swims like a fish.  
He walks like a duck.  
She acts like a fool.

**Pattern 2:** "as"  
as + adjective + as + noun

Examples

He is as tall as a giant.  
She is as graceful as a swan.  
He was as quiet as a mouse.

Fill in the blanks to finish these similes then add more of your own.



1. \_\_\_\_\_ felt like \_\_\_\_\_.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ seems as dark as \_\_\_\_\_.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ stopped me like \_\_\_\_\_.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ as slimy as \_\_\_\_\_.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ as lovely as \_\_\_\_\_.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ as bright as \_\_\_\_\_.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ ran like \_\_\_\_\_.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ smelled rotten like \_\_\_\_\_.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ danced like \_\_\_\_\_.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ as wiggly \_\_\_\_\_.

