

SAMPLE LESSON 1

***i see the rhythm—* A History of African-American Music**

Background Information for Teachers

Many Americans have made lasting contributions to the world of music, including John Philip Sousa, George Gershwin, Leonard Bernstein, Billie Holiday, Ferde Grofé, Woody Guthrie, Quincy Jones, Charles Ives, and Richard Rodgers—all of whom are studied in other units in this series. The contributions of Americans to the world of music focused on in the first section of this unit are those made by African Americans that come out of a rich African-American culture.

These opening lessons give an overview of African-American music from the songs of the slaves to the blues to ragtime to jazz to R & B to the current explosion of hip hop. The lessons that follow these spotlight some of the best-known names in this remarkable history, including Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, and the Funk Brothers.

Topics for Discussion

1. Introduce the book *i see the rhythm*, with illustrations by Michele Wood. Students who studied the K-1 unit *Portraits in the Arts* may remember Wood, who was one of 14 artists included in *Just Like Me*, a collection of autobiographical sketches and self-portraits of book illustrators. If students have not studied that unit, borrow the book from one of the K-1 teachers in your school or from the library and read aloud the short sketch by Wood. Show her self-portrait to the students.

You should understand that *i see the rhythm* contains far more information than can be used with students in grades 2-3. The timeline of historical events and musical events (which runs in small print throughout the book) is excellent, but probably too advanced for most students of this age. You should find it helpful, however, in your own understanding of how these

ArtWorks Unit: America's Contributions to the Arts

various musical styles fit into their historical context and, whenever you can, you might want to integrate some of the historical items into the lessons. However, these lessons will focus on the timeline events that have to do with the history of the music being studied.

You should focus on Toyomi Igus's poems about each musical period, Wood's arresting illustrations, and the short paragraph about each musical period (also in small print on each two-page spread). Some of the poems are relatively sophisticated, but they are vividly written and should be intriguing to students, even if they cannot understand every single line. The poems' rhythm, sometime rhyme, and vocabulary are well worth hearing and enjoying almost for their music-like sound alone.

Given your own time constraints in class, you may need to choose among the many musical periods presented in this book. If you are not going to do them all, read through the book and this material to help you choose the ones that might be most interesting for your students.

2. Show students the photographs of Wood and Igus on the inside back flap of the book cover. Read aloud the opening note from Igus to her readers on page 3. Ask students these questions and make these points:
 - Talk about what the word ***rhythm*** means (a pattern of ***beats***, of sounds and pauses). Ask students who play a musical instrument to tap out various *rhythms* on their desks or to clap various *rhythms* with their hands.
 - Why did Wood listen to music while she painted? How did it help her get in the right mood to do her paintings? Did you ever listen to music while you painted or drew pictures?
 - What does Igus challenge students to do? (write their own poems, stories, and music and make their own pictures)
 - Show Wood's illustration (on page 2) and read the paragraph that goes with it. What looks "energetic" about the illustration? (It looks as though the people are moving.. Notice that their feet and legs seem to be in motion. The signs for the Savoy, the Cotton Club, and the Apollo are bright white, as if they were lit up in neon.)
3. Read aloud the paragraph about Africa at the top of page 4. Show Wood's illustration as you read Igus's poem. Read aloud

ArtWorks Unit: America’s Contributions to the Arts

the first and last entries in the timeline on page 5. Ask students these questions and make these points:

- Go over the meanings of these vocabulary words: **origins, griots, harmony, shackled, forbidden.**
 - What provided the rhythm in African music? (drums)
 - What was the role of the masked dancers (point out the dancer in Wood’s beautiful illustration)? (They told stories in dance. Students who studied the *How To Tell a Story* unit for grades 2–3 in this series heard a book read aloud about African masks and the dancers who wear them to tell stories.) Does that mask look scary to you?
 - Tell students who the Ibo, Yoruba, and Bantu are. Help students find out where these groups live in Africa. (The Yoruba are placed on the map of Africa on the inside back cover of the book *Can You Spot the Leopard?* that is part of the *How To Tell a Story* unit.)
 - Who are the **slavers**? (the slave traders—that is, the people who owned the slave ships and took Africans away against their will to the New World to be sold)
 - Where is the drum in the illustration? (on the right) How is it being played? (with a stick) How else could you play a drum? (with your hand)
 - Point out some of the background illustrations and the patterns that Wood used.
4. Read aloud the paragraph about slave songs on the left side of page 7. Show Wood’s illustration as you read Igus’s poem. Ask students these questions and make these points:
- Go over the meanings of these vocabulary words: **plantation, labor, till, sow, toil.**
 - Teach or review the meaning of **onomatopoeia** (words that sound like their meanings; sound effect words). Point out that *swish* and *chop* are examples of *onomatopoeia*. Have students think of other examples (such as *bang, wham, tick-tock, choo-choo, pop, buzz, pow, hiss*).
 - Talk about the meaning of the lines from “The Big Bee Flies High.” How do you think the “black folks” felt?
 - Talk about the famous line “Let my people go.” You need not give students the Biblical background referring to letting the Israelites go from Egypt where they had been

ArtWorks Unit: America's Contributions to the Arts

oppressed. Help students understand that, in this context, the line is referring to letting the slaves be freed from their white masters.

- Is Wood's illustration **realistic**—that is, do the people and objects look as they do in real life? (only partly realistic, because the viewer cannot see the details of the faces or hands of the slaves or the details of the cotton field where they are working) What expressions can you see on the faces of the slaves? (They look tired and sad. Their eyes are closed or looking down. They are not smiling.) Look at how Wood used the blue of the slaves' clothing and the sky to contrast with the yellow field. Tell students that Wood probably chose those colors because she knew they would work well together and that the yellow would make the blue look bluer and that the blue would make the yellow look yellower. Do you agree?
5. Read aloud the paragraph about **the blues** at the top of page 8. Show Wood's illustration as you read Igus's poem. Read aloud the 1871 entry in the timeline on page 8. Tell students that the extremely talented Fisk Jubilee Singers tour today and sing **a capella** (that is, without musical accompaniment). You might want to purchase or borrow the recent CD made by the Fisk Jubilee Singers, entitled *In Bright Mansions*, which has many beautiful spirituals on it, so that you can play some for your students. Ask students these questions and make these points:
- Go over the meanings of these vocabulary words: **chants, dues, emancipated**.
 - Why did the African Americans who created *the blues* sing when they were sad? (It was one way they expressed their feelings.) Do you think it helped them feel better? How else could you express your feelings when you are sad? (Write a poem, write a journal entry, paint a picture.)
 - Look at the two groups of people in Wood's illustration—the men working on the railroad in the front (in brown) and the people playing and dancing to music in the background (in green). Are the people in green singing about the men in brown? Who is the person in brown standing at the right side of the illustration? (a supervisor, or foreman) Explain to students that, while African Americans worked on the railroad lines, they also used the railroads to get away from their lives in the

ArtWorks Unit: America’s Contributions to the Arts

South and head north. (Students who studied the *People on the Move* unit for grades 2–3 in this series studied about the Great Migration and saw Jacob Lawrence’s famous series of paintings about African Americans moving north by train.)

- What does Igus mean when she says that these people were “emancipated but not yet free”? (that they were freed legally from being slaves any longer, but that they still suffered greatly from prejudice and oppression in their everyday lives and treatment by white people)
 - What is the **mood** of this poem—mainly happy or sad? (mainly sad)
6. Read aloud the paragraph about **ragtime** at the top of page 10. Show Wood’s illustration as you read Igus’s poem. Read aloud the first two entries in the timeline on page 10. Ask students these questions and make these points:
- Go over the meanings of these vocabulary words: **mimicking, cultured, optimistic.**
 - How do you think *ragtime* music compares to *the blues*? (Ragtime sounds happier.)
 - How would you describe the way people dressed in Wood’s illustration? (fancy, beautiful, expensive looking)
 - Read aloud the 1910 entry in the timeline. How could Walker have become so successful? (African-American women were beginning to have more money to spend on themselves.)
 - What is the **mood** of this poem—mainly happy or sad? (mainly happy)
7. Read aloud the paragraph about **jazz** at the top of page 12. Show Wood’s illustration as you read Igus’s poem. Read aloud the 1901 entry in the timeline on page 12. Tell students that they will be seeing a video presentation about Louis Armstrong’s life and music later in this unit. Ask students these questions and make these points:
- Go over the meanings of these vocabulary words: **banjo-picking, Dixieland, wails, jubilant, balconies.**
 - What do you think growing up in the Storyville section of New Orleans would have been like 100 years ago? Do you think that music would have been a part of your everyday life?

ArtWorks Unit: America's Contributions to the Arts

- Who created *jazz*? (possibly musicians in New Orleans, who got together, played music, and created jazz from the musical styles they heard around them)
 - Look at Wood's illustration. Does the street look busy? (yes) How many musicians can you see? (perhaps 9) Can you get a good impression about the way Storyville looked from this illustration?
 - How can you "see" the "rhythm of jazz"? Isn't rhythm something you hear? Can you see it in the people moving in the street? Could you see it if you watched a funeral parade with musicians playing in it?
8. Read aloud the paragraph about **swing** at the top of page 15. Show Wood's illustration as you read Igus's poem. Read aloud the 1924–25 and 1927–31 entries in the timeline on page 15. Tell students that they will be studying more about the lives and music of Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington in this unit. Ask students these questions and make these points:
- Look at two rhymes in the poem: *jazz—pizzazz* and *thing—swing*. What do you think *pizzazz* means? How does the word make you feel? What do the lines from Ellington's song mean? (If music doesn't swing, it's not great music.) What do you think music that "swings" sounds like—fast or slow, happy or sad, loud or soft?
 - Look at the words Igus uses to describe *jazz* and jazz greats—*finger-poppin'*, *foot-stompin'*, and *toe-tappin'*. Why does she use those words? How do they sound?
 - Tell students that "Hi de hi de ho" was a well-known line used by famous **bandleader** Cab Calloway.
 - Look at Wood's illustration. Can you "see" the rhythm in the people dancing? Which is your favorite dancer? Which is your favorite musician? Can you find the *bandleader*? (in the upper left with his arms raised to conduct) Can you name the instruments you see? (bass, saxophones, trombones, trumpets) Why do you think Wood paints the faces of the people with such bright colors—blue, yellow, green, and red?
9. Read aloud the paragraph about the women of *jazz* at the top of page 16. Show Wood's illustration as you read Igus's poem. Read aloud the first and last entries in the timeline on page 16. Ask students these questions and make these points:

ArtWorks Unit: America's Contributions to the Arts

- Talk with students about what **scat singing** is. (singing nonsense syllables in place of words and trying to make it sound like a musical instrument) Have you ever heard *scat singing*?
 - Talk about Billie Holiday and her well-known lyrics from “God Bless the Child.” (Students who studied the *People on the Move* unit for grades 2–3 in this series studied about the Great Migration and listened to Holiday’s famous rendition of this song. You might wish to play it again here.) What do these lyrics mean? (It is important for someone to be able to rely on himself/herself and to be responsible for himself/herself.)
 - Look at Wood’s illustration. Can you find the faces of the singers she is portraying? Why do you think she colored differently only Fitzgerald’s face and the faces of the two musicians? What do the musicians’ faces look like? (African masks) What instruments are they playing? (bass and trumpet, although he is not holding the trumpet up in a typical playing position) Can you find other musicians in the illustration? (a child and a woman playing piano in the lower right corner) Point out the way the blue patterned clothes of the people seem to merge with the blue background patterns.
10. Read aloud the paragraph about **be bop** at the top of page 19. Show Wood’s illustration as you read Igus’s poem. Read aloud the 1940s and 1947 entries in the timeline on page 19. Ask students these questions and make these points:
- Talk about Charlie “Bird” Parker, who helped invent *be bop*. Students who studied the *Portraits in the Arts* unit for grades K–1 in this series learned about Charlie Parker and his music. If students have not studied that unit, borrow the book—*Charlie Parker played be bop*—and cassette from one of the K–1 teachers in your school and play at least an excerpt from the cassette so students can hear how *be bop* sounds.
 - Discuss what **improvisation** means—playing without planning what you are going to play in advance and without reading from sheet music. Explain that singers can **improvise**—like Fitzgerald when she does *scat singing*—and instrumentalists can *improvise* by playing a solo entirely of their own creation while the rest of the musical group plays back-up. Would you have to be a really good musician to *improvise*? (yes, because you

ArtWorks Unit: America's Contributions to the Arts

would have to understand the musical piece being played well enough to create some new version of it right out of your head) Point out that Igus calls these improvisational solos “flights of fancy.”

- Tell students what **zoot suits** are—men’s suits with wide-legged, tightly cuffed pants and a long coat with wide lapels and big padded shoulders. Point out the **porkpie hat** in Wood’s illustration. What does Igus mean by “shades”? (sunglasses) What does she mean by “the living end”? (really cool)
 - Look at Wood’s illustration. Talk about her choice of colors. (browns and yellows, no blues this time) Talk about the way she details the musicians’ faces. By now, students should be able to tell that this way of rendering faces is part of her style. How many instruments do you see? (drum set, trumpet, saxophone, piano, bass, and bongos) Talk about what bongos and congas are. Make sure students notice the little bits of white sheet music that Wood includes in the illustration—in the background (upper left), in the shirt of the bongo player, and on the keyboard of the piano. Which musician’s face is most interesting? (perhaps the bass player’s, whose head seems detached from the body, as he is squeezed in between the drummer and trumpeter)
11. Read aloud the paragraph about **cool jazz** at the top of page 21. Show Wood’s illustration as you read Igus’s poem. Read aloud the 1949, 1954 (first half), and 1955 entries in the timeline on page 21. Ask students these questions and make these points:
- Why do you think Wood picked blues for this illustration? (Blues are considered cool, not warm, colors.) What colors would you consider “warm”? (reds, yellows, oranges) Notice how she makes the windows out of rectangles of black or white and how she paints the skyscrapers with very little realistic detail. Point out the elevated subway train car and the people inside. Make sure students understand that, in part of New York City, the subway runs underground and, in other parts, it is elevated way above the street level.
 - What feeling does Wood’s illustration give you? How do you think the trumpeter—presumably Miles Davis—feels up on that rooftop?

ArtWorks Unit: America's Contributions to the Arts

- Point out the **alliteration** in Igus's poem—"smooth sounds," "bop beats," "cosmic waves of Coltrane's sax," "sounds of subway trains," "hard-heeled," and "tall steel towers." What effect does the *alliteration* have on the listener? (It helps move the poem along and gives it a musical or rhythmical quality.)
 - Igus's last line is especially effective: "I see the cool tones of modern jazz escape the city heat." What picture does that line paint for you? (perhaps something like little musical notes floating up to the sky from hot city streets)
12. Read aloud the paragraph about **gospel** music at the top of page 22. Show Wood's illustration as you read Igus's poem. Read aloud the 1947 and 1954 entries in the timeline on page 22. Ask students these questions and make these points:
- What are the grandparents remembering in the first stanza? (probably struggles for equal rights for African Americans)
 - What are the parents struggling for in the second stanza? (again, probably struggling for equal rights for African Americans)
 - If you got a copy of the Fisk Jubilee Singers' CD, you can play "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands" for students. It is a beautiful version of the song—a bit more classical in style than the often-heard hand-clapping, faster popular version.
 - What did Wood choose to use for her illustration? (a stained glass window from a church—but the viewer is really looking in through the window at what is going on in the church) Who is in the middle of the picture with his hand raised? (the minister of the church) Who are the people standing behind the minister? (the choir) Who are the mother and child on the right? (members of the church who are coming to the church service) What kind of expressions do the people have on their faces?
13. Read aloud the paragraph about **R & B** on the right of page 25. Show Wood's illustration as you read Igus's poem. Read aloud all of the entries in the timeline on page 25 (which include some important modern events in the struggles of African Americans for equality). Note that there are three errors in this chapter (one in the timeline and two in the illustration): it is Berry Gordy, Jr., (not Barry Gordy) who was the founder of Motown; it is William "Smokey" (not Smoky) Robinson, who was the famed

ArtWorks Unit: America’s Contributions to the Arts

lead singer of The Miracles and brilliantly prolific Motown songwriter; and it is “Maybellene” (not “Mabellene”), which was one of the inimitable Chuck Berry’s enormous hits. Ask students these questions and make these points:

- Go over the meanings of these vocabulary words: ***resonate, radiate***.
- Discuss the *alliteration* in Igus’s poem: “resonate from our record players and radiate from our radios.” Talk about how teenagers listened to music on records played on record players in the 1960s rather than on iPods or CDs.
- Look at the rhyme in Igus’s poem: “Out there we struggle for an equal chance, but inside our homes we dance, dance, dance” Just as *swing* was great music to dance to earlier, ***soul music*** was great music to dance to during the 1960s.
- Talk about the fact that some record companies owned by African Americans helped make and distribute more records by African Americans and, thus, popularized their music with both African-American and white audiences. Perhaps the most successful of these was Berry Gordy’s Motown record company in Detroit (known as “Motor City” for all the cars that are manufactured there). Tell students that they will hear the music of Motown and meet the Funk Brothers, who created that music, later in this unit.
- Look at some of the other great names in *R & B* music (shown in the illustration): the Jackson 5 (with the young Michael Jackson singing lead), Smokey Robinson, Stevie Wonder, Little Richard, The Supremes (memorialized in the illustration of the three female singers in the bottom right corner), and the still-great Jerry Butler (who started as the lead singer of The Impressions, became a solo artist and a respected civil rights activist, and is now a local government official in Chicago).
- Talk with students about James Brown’s famous line: “Say it loud—I’m black and I’m proud.” What would this have meant to African Americans in the 1960s and 1970s? What do you think this line means to African Americans today? (Depending on the maturity of your students, you might want to discuss the fact that Smokey Robinson recited a poem he had written on

ArtWorks Unit: America’s Contributions to the Arts

Russell Simmons’ *Def Poetry* television show on HBO about his preference for being called “black” rather than “African American.” His poem was an interesting and insightful perspective on what “black” means to him and how he believes it defines him and his family better than “African American” does.)

- Notice both the central colored part of Wood’s illustration (the family at home dancing to the record player) and the background parts—the Motown bus on tour, the record labels, the record companies, the radio stations, the police in riot gear in a burning city. Point out how much information Wood managed to present in this one illustration.
14. Read aloud the paragraph about black rock at the top of page 26. Show Wood’s illustration as you read Igus’s poem. Read aloud the first two entries and the last entry in the timeline on page 26. Ask students these questions and make these points:
- Talk about what the 1960s were like—especially as African Americans protested their everyday lives in many of America’s cities and worked to improve living conditions for their children.
 - Explain that some of the music of the late 1960s was angrier than the earlier music had been and tried to make a statement about what African Americans wanted for themselves. As Igus says, people joined together in this protest: “Black, white, Asian, Latino voices chant together/for civil rights and world peace.”
 - Note that the guitarist in Wood’s illustration is Jimi Hendrix, one of the greatest guitarists of the rock era. How is he dressed? Explain that the bright colors and patterns shown in this illustration were popular among many young people in the late 1960s. Notice in the background that Wood has included a sketch of the U.S.’s first landing on the moon (on the right side of the illustration, purple on green). Point out that some of the stick figures shown in the yellow portion of the illustration appear to be fighting with each other, commemorating the race riots that broke out in America’s cities.
15. Read aloud the paragraph about the **funk** sound at the top of page 29. Show Wood’s illustration as you read Igus’s poem. Read aloud the entries in the timeline on page 29. Ask students these questions and make these points:

ArtWorks Unit: America's Contributions to the Arts

- Look at the last stanza: “One nation/under a groove/nothing can stop us now.” Tell students that “groove” means something like the feeling of a good rhythm in a piece of music. What does Igus mean by “nothing can stop us now”? Who is “us”? (African Americans) What does the line mean? (Nothing will stop African Americans from getting all of their rights and an equal chance at living a good life.)
 - How is this illustration by Wood like her others? (the faces of the people) How is it different? (more colorful, fewer background patterns) What are the people at the bottom doing? (riding in a car and listening to the radio) What instruments do you see in the band onstage? (bongos, conga drum, drum set, guitar) Notice the platform shoes worn by two of the band members.
16. Read aloud the paragraph about **hip hop** at the top of page 30. Show Wood's illustration as you read Igus's poem. Read aloud the entries in the timeline on page 31. Ask students these questions and make these points:
- Explain that *hip hop* is a culture that has its own music (**rap**, **scratching**, and **sampling**), art (**graffiti**), and dance (**break dancing**). Though started in New York City, *hip hop* has now spread all over the world.
 - What is the “Motherland”? (Africa) What does Igus mean by “Fathered by funk and nurtured by mother Africa”? (that *hip hop* is a blend of funk and the sounds of Africa that are part of African Americans' heritage)
 - What does Igus think of **rappers**? (that they are trying to connect with their African heritage and that they are telling the truth about their lives in their music) Tell students that they will hear some *rap* later in this unit.
 - Look at the last line: “I see the rhythm of hip hop/and the rhythm lives on in me.” What is Igus trying to say? (that the rhythm of African-American music will live on in the next generation and may even become another style of music, just as all the others have)
 - How many instruments can you see in Wood's illustration? (bass, saxophone, conga drum, a record on a turntable with the arm and the needle extending over it, trumpet, guitar) What are the two figures in blue doing? (The one on the left might be break dancing, and the one on the right is rapping.) Look at the pictures in Wood's background. How many can you identify? (a

ArtWorks Unit: America's Contributions to the Arts

child with her parents, a young woman graduating, a wedding, the peace sign, a religious cross, people at work)

17. Read aloud the paragraph entitled “looking for missy” at the bottom of page 32. Help students find the image of Missy in each of Wood’s illustrations.

Language Arts Activities

Students may choose—or you may choose for them—one or more of these language arts activities to complete individually or in small groups, as time permits:

1. Which did you like better in *i see the rhythm*—the poems or the illustrations? Why? Explain your reasoning to your classmates.
2. Draw a face the way that Michele Wood drew the faces in *i see the rhythm*. Try to use both her style and her choice of colors.
3. Draw a picture while you listen to some music that your teacher plays for your class. It might be the blues or R & B or hip hop. Ask the teacher to tell you what style the music is. Draw the picture the way the music makes you feel.
4. Get a CD of Scott Joplin’s music and listen to what ragtime sounds like. Make a list of 10 adjectives that describe his music.
5. Get a CD of Ella Fitzgerald’s music and listen to what scat singing sounds like. Do you like it? Defend your answer to your classmates.
6. Which African-American music is your favorite? Do you listen to it at home? Who is your favorite musician or singer in that style of music? Share your answers with your classmates.
7. Write a letter to the singer or musician whom you liked best in these lessons. Tell that person why you like his or her music.

***ArtWorks* Unit: America's Contributions to the Arts**

8. Make a timeline of the history of African-American music in the U.S. Put the styles of music on the timeline in chronological order. Illustrate the timeline appropriately.