THEATER: CAT ANDERSON
Grades 4–6

Objectives:

- Students will act in a scene with a written script.
- Students will interpret and evaluate live performances as an active audience member.
- Students will understand the history of jazz music in Charleston.

Materials:

- Slideshow HERE
- Paper
- Pencils

Background:

- When you come to the Charleston Gaillard Center, you will experience an exciting and energetic big band concert created just for students like you! *Jazz Day for Kids*, presented by the Charleston Jazz Orchestra in partnership with the Gaillard Center's Education and Community Program, is a fun and educational performance about jazz music. Led by Robert Lewis and Charlton Singleton, Gaillard Center artist-in-residence emeritus, the Charleston Jazz Orchestra will introduce you to the vibrant world of jazz through live music, engaging performances, and an unforgettable celebration of this uniquely American art form.
- Jazz is a type of American music that stems from African American folk traditions and uses lively rhythms and melodies that are often composed by musicians as they play. With influences from African and Spanish music, it is a unique blend of many styles including gospel music, brass bands, and blues. Jazz uses musical notes that are "bent" to create emotion in the music. Jazz bands can create rhythm from several kinds of instruments. Jazz music was developed in New Orleans, Louisiana in the late 1800s. By the 1920s jazz was flourishing in Chicago and New York. During a song, the rhythms can shift and change too![1]

[1] "US History: Jazz," Ducksters, accessed July 2, 2026, https://www.ducksters.com/history/us_1900s/jazz.php

- The Jenkins Orphanage was founded by Reverend Daniel Joseph Jenkins in Charleston, SC, to shelter orphaned Black children amid the hardships that followed Reconstruction in South Carolina in the late 1800s. Receiving no state or federal funding, Reverend Jenkins created a jazz band as a means of generating income for the orphans' care. As the Great Migration expanded Black audiences beyond the South in the early 1900s, the Jenkins Orphanage Band gained new opportunities to tour and perform across the country. Cat Anderson did not join until the 1930s, by which point the orphanage had grown into a community music institution: Black families were enrolling their children for music lessons, and demand was such that a second jazz band was established.

Activity Directions:

- Present slideshow HERE on the Jenkins Orphanage Band and Cat Anderson.
- We are going to use theater to retell historical events based on the Jenkins Orphanage Band and Cat Anderson. Today, you will become actors. As actors, we will begin by learning three basics; tone, pitch and pace
- Describe the differences between tone, pitch, and pace.
    - Tone - emotion behind what you're saying
    - Pitch - high or low sound
    - Pace - fast or slow
- Experiment changing tone, pitch, and pace for the same words (for example, "I love jazz music," or "We improvise as we go"). Try saying these slow and sad; then try saying them happy and fast.
- Discuss what every scene needs to be successful: clear characters, beginning/middle/end, purposeful movement, dynamic tone.
- Break students into four groups. Each will create a skit based on one point of Cat Anderson's life. Offer pencil and paper if they would like specific lines; they may also choose to create a structure and improvise the lines.
- Present skits to the class in order. If there is extra time, have students offer compliments or questions to the presenting group.
    - Group 1 scene: After losing his parents in the 1930s, a four-year-old Cat Anderson arrives in Charleston to seek refuge at the Jenkins Orphanage.
    - Group 2 scene: A young Cat Anderson is presented with his first trumpet, beginning the musical journey that would lead to his mastery within the Orphanage Band.

- Group 3 scene: The Jenkins Orphanage Band, including a youthful Cat, anticipates the thrill of embarking on their debut major tour beyond the city of Charleston.
- Group 4 scene: Following his premiere performance for Duke Ellington, Cat Anderson reflects on demonstrating his legendary and remarkably high trumpet range.

Conclusion:
Today we learned about Charleston's rich history of jazz music with the Jenkins Orphanage Band. From humble beginnings, Cat Anderson went on to become a world-renowned trumpet player. When you come to see the performance at the Gaillard, remember that jazz here in Charleston has a long history that has helped to shape this art form.

SC Academic Standards:
Theatre Anchor Standard 3: I can act in improvised scenes and written scripts.
Theatre Anchor Standard 5: I can interpret and evaluate live or recorded dramatic performances as an active audience member.

4th grade Social Studies Standards:
4.5.CC Recognize and assess how various social, political, and financial factors influenced the lives of African Americans during the period of Reconstruction.
This standard promotes investigation into how this era established the early groundwork for the civil rights movement. It additionally encourages exploration into policies from the Reconstruction timeframe, including new constitutional amendments, the implementation of black codes, and the rise of segregationist Jim Crow Laws.
4.5.E Examine the diverse viewpoints regarding the societal, governmental, and economic consequences of Reconstruction on various groups within the Southern states and across the United States.

5th grade Social Studies Standards:
Standard 1: Demonstrate an understanding of the economic, political, and social effects of expansion and industrialization on the United States and South Carolina between 1860–1910.
5.1.CE Examine push- and pull-factors related to immigration and expansion on urban and rural populations during the period.