WATERCOLOR JAZZ
Grades K–3

Objectives:

- Students will use the elements and principles of art to create artwork and relate visual arts ideas to jazz music.
- Students will learn how the elements of music are used in a variety of genres, cultures, and time periods.
- Students will listen to and identify instruments by sight and sound.
- Students will evaluate and critique key literary elements that enhance and deepen meaning within and across texts.

Materials:

- Copy of *This Jazz Man* by Karen Ehrhardt (read aloud HERE)
- Watercolors
- Watercolor Paper
- Water cups
- Paintbrushes
- Jazz instrument stencils (saxophone, trumpet, drums, piano)
- Black markers or crayons
- Videos of different instruments (see below)

Background:

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. During a song, the rhythms can shift and change too![1]

Today, we are going to explore four different instruments that are commonly used in jazz (trumpet, saxophone, piano, and drums). You are going to attribute a color for each instrument sound. For example, you might think of blue waves when you

[1] "Synesthesia," Cleveland Clinic, accessed July 2, 2026, https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/symptoms/24995-synesthesia.

hear the smooth, soft sounds of a piano. Based on the instrument that resonated most with you, consider using that color throughout your watercolor.

Much like jazz, there aren't strict rules. Jazz often relies on improvisation. Improvisation means that musicians are often creating the song in the moment. The watercolor artwork we create today will be a form of abstract art. Like jazz, abstract art does not follow strict rules. You may improvise your art as you create it.

Directions:

- Read *This Jazz Man* by Karen Ehrhardt (read aloud HERE).
- Explain the history of jazz to the students (see above).
- Play each video below. After, have students describe the instrument. What emotions did each instrument evoke? What was the tone of the instrument? What color(s) would you attribute to that instrument?
- Louis Armstrong (trumpet) HERE
- Sonny Rollins (saxophone) HERE
- Art Tatum (piano) HERE
- Art Blakey (drums) HERE
- Pass out watercolors, paintbrushes, paper, black crayons/markers, and stencils.
- Have each student pick a stencil of the instrument that most resonates with them.
- Color in that stencil with a black crayon or marker to create a silhouette.
- Use the watercolors to create abstract art to represent the sound coming out of that instrument.
- If students have extra time, encourage them to add another instrument to their artwork or add in music notes.
- Let students use their imagination to take creative liberties with their artwork.
- Have each student present their artwork to the class. Ask them to share what inspired their artwork and specific choices (for example, "Why did you choose the trumpet?" "What inspired you to use blue as your main color?")

Conclusion:

Today you created watercolor artwork based on instruments commonly used in jazz music. Much like jazz, creating artwork often involves improvising along the way. When you see the performance, look for the instrument you chose and see if you think of those same colors when you listen to the music live.

SC Academic Standards:
Visual Arts Anchor Standard 1: I can use the elements and principles of art to create artwork.
Visual Arts Anchor Standard 7: I can relate visual arts ideas to other arts disciplines, content areas, and careers.
GM.R IL.6: I can explain how the elements of music are used in a variety of genres, cultures, and time periods.
GM.R IL.6.2: I can listen to and identify orchestral, band, and electronic instruments by sight and sound.
ELA.AOR.1: Evaluate and critique key literary elements that enhance and deepen meaning within and across texts.

Bibliography:
Cleveland Clinic. “Synesthesia.” Updated May 23, 2023. https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/symptoms/24995-synesthesia.