“As a Black woman, I recognize that I am standing on the shoulders of those Black women who have come before—in history and in ‘her-story’ of jazz music. Black female instrumentalists who have helped shape, mold, and define what we know as jazz today, such as Mary Lou Williams, Viola ‘Vi’ Burnside, Elvira ‘Vi’ Redd, Ernestine ‘Tiny’ Davis, Lil Hardin Armstrong, Clora Bryant, and the list goes on and on.”

—Tia Fuller

Tia Fuller is an acclaimed and in-demand saxophonist, recording artist, composer and bandleader who was recently featured in the Pixar animated movie Soul. Fuller plays jazz, R&B, pop music and other genres—all with creative bravado, precision and technique that have been honed on the world’s biggest stages. She teaches full-time at the Berklee College of Music in Boston, but also maintains a busy touring and recording schedule that has her playing with artists like Beyoncé.

Originally from Denver, Colorado, Fuller earned her bachelor’s degree in music from Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia. She earned her master’s degree in jazz pedagogy and performance from the University of Colorado at Boulder. One of her most notable accomplishments was performing as part of Beyoncé’s tours including I AM ... Sasha Fierce and the Beyoncé Experience, which allowed her to travel around the globe. She also had the distinct honor of playing with Beyoncé at the White House for President Barack Obama.

As a soloist, bandleader and composer, Fuller has released five albums: Diamond Cut, which received a GRAMMY® nomination in the Best Instrumental Jazz category, and Pillar of Strength, Healing Space, Decisive Steps, and Angelic Warrior. Her quartet has performed in numerous countries such as Italy, Scotland, Angola, South Africa and Croatia, among others.

As an artist, Fuller has worked with countless notable names in music including Terri Lyne Carrington, Dianne Reeves, the T.S. Monk Sextet, the Duke Ellington Orchestra, Chaka Khan, Kelly Rowland, Jay-Z, Jill Scott, Patti LaBelle, Dionne Warwick, Janelle Monae, Erykah Badu and Aretha Franklin—just to name a few.

The film Soul, which was released in December 2020 by Pixar Studios, is a heartwarming movie about Joe Gardner, a middle school teacher in New York City who is hoping for his big break in the professional jazz music scene. His big break comes in the form of Dorothea Williams and her jazz quartet. Williams is an accomplished jazz saxophonist who gives Gardner a chance to play the piano for a gig at a club when one of her players couldn’t make it.

The voice of Dorothea Williams is portrayed by the actress Angela Bassett, but the sounds of the saxophone were masterfully provided by Fuller. This was her first contribution to a feature film, and to make the character more real, the appearance of Williams was modeled on Fuller as well, according to an interview on the website of Berklee College of Music.

“Something else that caught me by surprise is that Pixar changed Dorothea’s character and saxophone to emulate my image. Initially, they had a brown-skinned Black woman with a high bun and a bandana playing the tenor. But upon seeing the trailers, I saw the character shift to a darker-skinned mid-sized Black woman, with mid-length curly hair (how I had my hair at the time), playing an alto saxophone with a Vandoren mouthpiece and ligature. They were impeccable with details of all our body movements and motions,” she said.

Fuller was first approached by Pixar representatives because they had a Black woman saxophonist in mind as a key character, which was gratifying.

“To be the saxophonist for a Black woman in this film is to say that representation is imperative, that diversity and inclusivity amount to deconstructing marginalizing views and reconstructing a more accurate account of our strength and influence in society and music,” she said.
**Inspired Ideas in the Classroom**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Focus</th>
<th>Student Activity</th>
<th>NJ Student Learning Standards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Prepare for the performance** | **Listen**  
Show the video, “What is Jazz?” Discuss common characteristics and qualities of jazz music (improvisation, syncopation, call and response, typical jazz instruments, etc.). Have students complete Activity Sheet 1 and write down a personal response to these questions: What do you think of when you hear the word jazz? Do you enjoy listening to jazz music? Why or why not?  
Content link: [youtube.com/watch?v=hvM0AbbUtwg](https://youtube.com/watch?v=hvM0AbbUtwg)  
Credit: National Museum of American History | **Discuss**  
What do you already know about jazz? What information did you learn from watching the video? Do you enjoy listening to jazz music? Why or why not? | NJ Visual & Performing Arts Anchor Standard II  
English Language Arts NJSLA.S.2.1 |
| **Experience the performance** | **Review**  
Write jazz music can often be identified by improvisation, call and response, and syncopation (the rhythm emphasizes the off-beat), it is made up of many different styles. | | NJ Visual & Performing Arts Anchor Standard 10  
English Language Arts NJSLA.S.1.2 |
| **Reflect, respond and read** | **Reflect**  
What emotions did you feel during the performance? | | NJ Visual & Performing Arts Anchor Standard 10  
English Language Arts NJSLA.S.1.1 |
| **Focus** | **Respond**  
Identify one of the musicans from today’s performance and describe how they contributed to jazz music.  
Read: the article “Fierce Aurora-born Saxophonist Tia Fuller Takes Shot at Historic Grammy.” Ask students: What are some of Tia’s goals for herself and her music? What obstacles has Tia had to overcome in pursuit of her goals? How have other women in music and jazz inspired Tia Fuller?  
Credit: The Denver Post and Mesfin Fekadu, The Associated Press | **Respond**  
Identify one of the jazz musicians from today’s performance and describe how they contributed to jazz music.  
Read: the article “Fierce Aurora-born Saxophonist Tia Fuller Takes Shot at Historic Grammy.”  
What are some of Tia’s goals for herself and her music?  
What obstacles has Tia had to overcome in pursuit of her goals?  
How have other women in music and jazz inspired Tia Fuller? | NJ Visual & Performing Arts Anchor Standard 10  
English Language Arts NJSLA.S.1.1 |
| **Originate** | **Read**  
Read the questions on Activity Sheet 2 and reflect on your personal goals and inspirations. Then, create an inspiration board, poem or other artistic presentation to share with your classmates. Focus on one big goal that you have for yourself and a specific person who has inspired you. Write a short artistic statement to present along with your creation. | | NJ Visual & Performing Arts Anchor Standard 10  
Civic Readiness, Life Literacies, and Key Skills  
S.4.1.3.C.1 |
| **Rehearse** | **Rehearse**  
Ask students to find a quiet place in the classroom or their homes to practice creating, presenting or performing.  
It’s time to finalize your artistic creation! Make the final touches to your inspiration board, poem or other artistic work. Read through your artistic statement. Next, find a partner or family member and ask them the following questions:  
- Does my creation tell you my goal, who has inspired me and why?  
- Is my artistic statement clear and easy to understand?  
- (If applicable) Did I speak clearly, with a loud voice and eye contact? Use their suggestions to revise your work, then practice again! | | NJ Visual & Performing Arts Anchor Standard 5 |
| **Make magic** | **Read**  
Collect students’ work and display it in an inspiration gallery in a PowerPoint presentation. Include photographs or recordings of students’ creations and their artistic statements.  
It’s time to present! Record or take a photograph of your artistic work and submit it to your teacher. Then, check out your classmates’ goals and inspirations in the inspiration gallery! | | NJ Visual & Performing Arts Anchor Standard 10  
English Language Arts NJSLA.S.3.4 |
Women in Jazz

In the early days of jazz, most women were relegated to either dancing in the chorus line in venues such as the Cotton Club in New York City, or of course, singing. Notable names of women in jazz include vocalists like Sarah Vaughan and Ella Fitzgerald. Lesser known are women who were instrumentalists, composers and bandleaders but their contributions to jazz have been just as important, despite sexism from record companies and other gatekeepers. Many of these women were popular during their heyday but are not often recognized in modern jazz history. Below is a selected list of notable women in jazz who should be added to anybody’s playlist.

Lil Hardin Armstrong, pianist (1898–1971)

Lil Hardin Armstrong may be best known for being Louis Armstrong’s second wife, but she was a remarkable and well-respected jazz pianist, composer and bandleader well before their marriage in 1924.

Hardin Armstrong was born in 1898 in Memphis, Tennessee. She was raised by her mother, a domestic worker who was determined to give her children a good education. She attended Mrs. Hicks’ School of Music and Fisk University in Nashville. Her mother wanted her to be a classically trained musician and didn’t want her to be influenced by listening to blues and jazz, the popular music of the era. Hardin Armstrong’s family moved to Chicago, which had a big jazz scene and soon she became a professional pianist.

She played with many noteworthy bands and also fronted her own band. When she met her husband, trumpeter Louis Armstrong, they were both members of King Oliver’s Creole Jazz Band. She was a big influence on the trumpeter, encouraging him to leave the group and become a soloist. Unfortunately, their marriage broke apart in 1930 because of Louis Armstrong’s constant touring.

After their divorce, the pianist continued performing and recording. In the 1930s, sometimes billing herself as “Mrs. Louis Armstrong,” Hardin led an “All Girl Orchestra,” a mixed gender big band which broadcast nationally over the NBC radio network. In the same decade she recorded for Decca Records as a vocalist and performed as the piano accompanist for other singers.

Clora Bryant, trumpeter (1927–2019)

Clora Bryant was a fixture in America’s jazz scene for many years and mentored countless musicians in her home base of Los Angeles, California. She counted Dizzy Gillespie as one of her mentors and was praised...
She has the feeling of the trumpet. The feeling, not she hit middle age but nevertheless, fellow musicians gatekeepers. Historians initially overlooked her and she did not get as much recognition or support from the music industry throughout much of her long career. For her virtuosic playing, but she experienced sexism in the music industry throughout much of her long career. 

In 1946, Bryant became a member of the International Sweethearts of Rhythm, an all-female jazz band, and earned her union card and dropped out of school. Dizzy Gillespie became her mentor and provided her with work. She joined the black female jazz band the Queens of Swing as a drummer and went on tour. In 1951, she worked in Los Angeles as a trumpeter for Josephine Baker and Billie Holiday. In her later years, Bryant became an author, a lecturer at college campuses about the history of jazz, and a mentor to young people in the Los Angeles elementary schools system.

Valaida Snow, trumpeter (1904–1956)

Valaida Snow was not just a trumpeter but also a supremely talented and charismatic singer, dancer, arranger and storyteller. She could play just about every instrument in a band, toured all over the world and was a fixture in early Hollywood movies. She lived a full, expansive life in a relatively short amount of time, dying at the age of 52 after suffering bad health in her later years.

Snow was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee on June 2, 1904. Her mother was a music teacher and her father was a minister and manager of a vaudeville troupe of children called the Pickaninny Troubadours. Snow performed in this troupe and was the undisputed star. She played the violin and other instruments and incorporated dancing, singing and magic into her act. She toured for many years in Europe and Asia and only stopped because of World War II. Snow became stranded in Nazi-occupied Denmark and was imprisoned by authorities. She fled the country in 1942 and came back to America but she was visibly thinner and in bad health. Despite this setback, she went back to touring and making music until her untimely death. 

Ginger Smock, violinist (1920–1995)

Who knew you could play the violin with soul? Ginger Smock was a sensational violinist who could make the strings sing, wail, warble and swing. Her stunning skills made her a fixture in tours, clubs and hotel orchestras from the 1940s to the 1970s. Growing up, Smock was a child prodigy. She lost her parents by the time she was six years old and was raised by her aunt and uncle who made sure she received private classical lessons on the violin. She performed at the Hollywood Bowl at the age of 10 and then a recital at the First African Methodist Episcopal Church of Los Angeles. As she grew older, she joined the marching band and orchestra while in high school and then studied at the Zoeliner Conservatory of Music. It looked like Smock was headed for a life as a violinist in a professional classical orchestra but such opportunities were not available to African Americans due to racial discrimination. Instead, Smock gravitated towards popular music, especially big band jazz music, and studied the techniques of notable jazz violinists such as Joe Venuti, Stuff Smith, and Eddie South. Smock started her own band, a trio of woman instrumentalists called the Sepia Tones. She achieved many milestones in her career: becoming the first Black woman bandleader in television, headlining prestigious hotels and clubs, touring internationally and back celebrities such as Joe Venuti, Stuff Smith, and Eddie South. Smock's beloved violin is now part of the collection at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Mary Lou Williams, pianist (1910–1981)

Thrilling and evocative performances, marvelous and tour de force playing – these are just some of the terms people have used to describe Mary Lou Williams, who is considered one of the best jazz pianists of the genre. She was a prolific composer and recording artist who got to jam with some of jazz’s marquee names in the 1940s and 1950s. Her mother first trained her in classical piano and by the time she was four years old, Williams was clearly a musical prodigy. She had perfect pitch and could remember tunes. She started performing professionally with big bands when she was 12 years old when she subbed for another pianist in a traveling music show. Williams would go on tours and got to play with Fats Waller, Duke Ellington and Jelly Roll Morton. She became a bandleader in 1927 and then became a music arranger for a popular band, Andy Kirk and the Twelve Clouds of Joy. She was known for her piano playing and inventive arrangements for the group. Later she started arranging for other artists such as Benny Goodman, Cab Calloway, Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington. She was originally a swing-style pianist but then got involved in the bebop scene and composed several notable bebop songs such as “In The Land of Oo-Blah-Dee” and “Tisherone.” She also founded a record label called Mary Records. Until well into her old age, Williams continued performing, composing and teaching a new generation of artists. 

Elvira ‘Vi’ Redd, saxophonist (1928)

Redd is a talented alto and soprano saxophonist, singer, bandleader and teacher who has been active for many years in jazz. Her playing style is cool, confident and inventive. Music was always part of Redd’s world. Her father, Alton Redd, was a jazz drummer from New Orleans. Her great aunt was Alma Hightower, a notable singer, multi-instrumentalist and music teacher. She got her start singing publicly at church when she was five years old and she then started learning to play the saxophone when she was 12. In 1946, she started a band with Nathaniel Meeks, a trumpeter and her first husband. Since then, she has been performing professionally, both as a saxophonist and vocalist. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, she performed less and instead taught in public schools. After that period, she went back to performing and played with greats like Count Basie and Max Roach. Throughout her career, she toured all over the world and recorded two solo albums. 

Ernestine ‘Tiny’ Davis, trumpeter (1907–1994)

She may have been nicknamed Tiny, but there was nothing tiny about the sound Ernestine Davis belted from her trumpet. Davis was also a talented singer. She first received recognition for her membership in the International Sweethearts of Rhythm, a ground breaking all-female band that had its heyday in the 1940s. They played jazz and swing and toured all the country. The band was also notable for its racially integrated lineup of White, Black, Latina, Asian and Indian women. Jazz greats such as Louis Armstrong and Cab Calloway admired Davis’ playing in the band.


**Wind Instrument**
A type of musical instrument that a person blows into, which causes air to vibrate inside a resonator (usually a tube) and produces sound. The simplest wind instrument is a horn. Wind instruments can be divided into two groups: brass and woodwinds. Brass instruments, which don’t necessarily need to be made of brass, include horns, trumpets, trombones and tubas. Woodwind instruments are characterized by the use of a sharp edge that a player blows into. This sharp edge can be made of wood or another material.

**Saxophone**
An instrument in the woodwind family that is usually made of brass and has a reed mouthpiece which people blow into to make music. Musicians control the pitch of a saxophone by pressing the keys which cover various holes in the body of the instrument.

**Instrumentalist**
The player of a musical instrument.

**Bandleader**
The leader or conductor that leads a musical band during a performance. The term is usually used in the context of jazz, blues, R&B and rock music.

**Composer**
Someone who writes music for a living.

**Soloist**
In music, it is someone who sings or plays a solo. A solo is a piece of music that features one person either singing or playing an instrument.

**Quartet**
A band or group of four people playing music or singing.

**Music Arranger**
A music arranger takes an existing piece of music and rearranges it or reimagines it via the use of different instrumentation, addition or subtraction of melodies, etc.

**Harmony**
A grouping/combination of sounds, tones or notes being played at the same time that have a pleasing quality to the ear.

**Melody**
A composition of music that is arranged in a single progression that is pleasing to the ear and perceived by the listener as a single entity. Melody has an orderly pattern that is beautiful and satisfying to hear.

**Rhythm**
A repeated pattern of sound.

**Syncopation**
In music, it means sounds or notes that are played off beat or with music being stressed in unexpected places.

**Vocabulary**

**resources**

**Websites**
Tia Fuller Official Website
www.tiafuller.com

Tia Fuller Berklee College of Music
 berklee.edu/people/tia-fuller

Meet The First-Time GRAMMY Nominee: Tia Fuller On Growth, Artistic Vision & Leading By Example

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www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJHPe5eY1

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Tia Fuller Quartet
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Tia Fuller – Live In Dizzy’s Club
youtube.com/watch?v=FscWHeoZ4Q

Mondays with Kuumbwa – Episode 9 – Tia Fuller
youtube.com/watch?v=AotsEXh-HnE

Tia Fuller’s Berklee Rainbow Band, “Blues for Warren” (Thara Memory)
youtube.com/watch?v=Vngk2woOmhG

10 Incredible Women In Jazz Everyone Should Know
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Women in Jazz
youtube.com/watch?v=XLCcQvbAOXg

Female jazz musicians raise their voices against sexism
youtube.com/watch?v=4xh8hYRXQOo

Washington Women in Jazz Festival - Millennium Stage (March 18, 2019)
youtube.com/watch?v=sws5OdJi4Uc

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Women and Jazz: International Sweethearts of Rhythm
youtube.com/watch?v=CjmgB8epv

Women in Jazz Change the Sonic Landscape | 112BK
youtube.com/watch?v=O-LCqFwG0E

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NJPAC Arts Education programs are made possible by the generosity of our endowment donors: The Arts Education Endowment Fund in honor of Raymond C. Chambers, The Joan and Allen Bildner Family Fund, Toby and Lean Cooperman, Albert and Katherine Merck, The Sagner Family Foundation, Wells Fargo