

njpac
arts
education

schooltime
performance
series



jerome jennings
& ill philosophy

teacher resource guide



about the performance

Jerome Jennings is a versatile performer, composer, bandleader, teacher and activist. Both of his albums, *The Beast* (2016) and *Solidarity* (2019), were met with high acclaim. NPR named *The Beast* one of its top three jazz releases of 2016 and *Solidarity* as the “Best Music that Spoke Truth to Power in 2019,” as it focused on the experiences of African American women in society. In addition to performing as a drummer, Mr. Jennings is on the faculty at both Montclair State University and Princeton University, and frequently travels as a lecturer and clinician.

His genre-bending sextet consists of drums, trumpet, sax, keys, bass and turntables. The ensemble performs Jennings’ original compositions and arrangements rooted in jazz, fused with blues, bebop, Afrobeat and hip hop.

cultural connections

As both a musician and activist, Jerome Jennings crafted his second album *Solidarity* to reflect the struggles of African American women, specifically through the lenses of the Black Lives Matter and Me Too movements. In a 2019 interview with *Neon Jazz*, Jennings revealed his intention of the album to be to draw attention to significant women of color and situations in which they stood up to injustices in society: “Black women have traditionally been the conscience of the country. *Solidarity* means ... being present, not walking away. Being an ally, in a very overt way. ‘I got you. I hear you. I’m with you.’”

His desire to pay tribute to the African American female community began with the influence of those closest to him: his wife, aunt, mother and grandmother. He then began to research further into the journeys of African American female difference-makers such as Audrey Lorde who inspired his song “The Theory of Difference;” Senator Stephanie Flowers, whose speech is woven into “Convo with Senator Flowers” and transgender activist Marsha P. Johnson, whose famous retort prompted the song “Pay It No Mind.” More than just a “virtuosic modern jazz” album, Jennings intends for the album to engage listeners’ consciousnesses and make them feel a bit uncomfortable yet enjoy the melodies and rhythms composed.

vocabulary

Activist

A person who campaigns to bring about political or social change

Afrobeat

A style of popular music incorporating elements of African music and jazz, soul and funk

Arrangement

The adaptation of a musical composition for a specific purpose, often involving changes to the original piece’s instrumentation, harmony, rhythm and/or structure

Artist

A person who practices any of the various creative arts

Artist-Activist

An individual who uses their artistic skills and creative expression to advocate for social or political change

Avant Garde

A movement, style or group that is considered innovative, experimental and at the forefront of new ideas, particularly in the arts and culture

Bandleader

A performer and/or conductor at the head of a musical ensemble

Bebop

A style of jazz music characterized by fast tempos, complex chord progressions and virtuosic improvisations

Black Lives Matter Movement

A decentralized global movement advocating for the rights and liberation of Black people

Continuum

The continuous, uninterrupted flow or progression of events from the past, through the present and into the future

EPK

Acronym for Electronic Press Kit; a digital portfolio showcasing an artist, creative or business, often used to introduce them to industry professionals and the public

Fusion

A genre that combines elements from two or more distinct musical styles, cultures or traditions to create an innovative sound

Me Too Movement

A social movement that aims to raise awareness about the widespread prevalence of sexual harassment and assault

Sextet

A group of six people performing music together

Stand Your Ground Law

A law that allows individuals to use force, including deadly force, in self-defense without the obligation to retreat if they reasonably believe they are in danger, even in public spaces

Stonewall Riots

A series of spontaneous demonstrations by members of the LGBTQ+ community against a police raid that took place on June 28, 1969 at the Stonewall Inn in New York City

Traditionalism

A focus on established artistic styles, techniques and cultural expressions passed down through generations, often rooted in specific historical or regional contexts

Virtuosic

Displaying or characterized by exceptional technical skill in music or another artistic pursuit



inspired learning for the classroom

P

Prepare

Begin the lesson by checking in with your students. Some students (and teachers) come to school with what’s happening in their lives, so it’s important to spend two or three minutes in silence and regulate your mind and body. Afterward, let students share a one-word answer to a prompt (eg. If you were a texture, what texture would you be? If you could swap lives with a character, who would it be? What food would you be today?).

Introduce your students to their field trip by discussing what they already know about this art form, topic or type of performance. Then explain what they will see at the theater and why it’s important. This can be accomplished by sharing images, vocabulary or videos that might help them appreciate the performance.

Student Activity

Provide students with the link to Jerome Jennings’ biography. Introduce students to Jennings’ music by first playing a jazz standard, and then a Jerome Jennings song from one of his albums, *The Beast and Solidarity*.

Compare and contrast the two by creating a T-chart. Introduce the band iLL Philosophy by watching the compilation video “Jerome Jennings & iLL Philosophy Live in NYC 2025.” Define the terms traditionalism and avant garde, and discuss how Jennings both challenges and exemplifies these terms.

Jerome Jennings Biography | [artist website](#)

“In the Mood” by Glenn Miller, jazz standard | [video](#)

The Beast by Jerome Jennings | [playlist](#)

Solidarity by Jerome Jennings | [playlist](#)

Jerome Jennings & iLL Philosophy Live in NYC 2025 | [video](#)

NJ Student Learning Standards

Social & Emotional Learning Competencies
Self-Awareness, Social-Awareness

Visual & Performing Arts
Anchor Standard 7

E

Experience

For some students, this may be their first time in a theater. Review audience etiquette and go over expectations for arrival and departure from the theater. Before watching the show, provide discussion questions for them to consider during the performance.

As you watch the performance, ask students to consider the following questions:

- 1. What elements of the performance exemplify the term avant garde?
- 2. What styles do you hear within the music? Jennings fuses several!
- 3. What other artists do you know who have combined various styles and/or defied the limits of traditional music?

Social & Emotional Learning Competencies
Self-Awareness, Self-Management

Visual & Performing Arts
Anchor Standard 8, 10

R

Reflect

As a class, discuss the prompts from the previous section. Then have students reflect on the skill set of the performers they saw in the show. Go around the class and have each student fill in the following statement: I can already _____ like the performers did, but I can’t _____ yet. Their response can be about the performers themselves, the characters they represented, or another element they appreciated from the trip. After everyone is done, remind them that with enough time and practice, they can accomplish anything they set their minds to. After reflecting together, give students the chance to reflect privately by freeform writing or responding to a prompt.

As a class, discuss the prompts from the previous section and continue adding to your T-chart comparing traditional and avant garde jazz styles. Utilize the National Museum of American History’s video “[What is Jazz?](#)” and/or the Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz’s “[Elements of Jazz](#)” PDF as a resource to explore traditional jazz elements. Watch [Jerome Jennings Instagram video](#) to illustrate his avant garde approach. Then, invite students to respond individually by writing about an artist they enjoy who incorporates avant garde techniques into their music, and provide a link to an exemplar performance.

English Language Arts
W.AW.9.10.1.

Visual & Performing Arts
Anchor Standard 8, 9, 10

F

Focus

Have students do research and complete the *SchoolTime* **activity sheets** that focuses on the following theme: How did the life experience of the artist influence their work?

Define the term artist-activist and discuss how Jennings fills this role. Invite students to research other artist-activists using **Activity Sheet 1**. Examine Arkansas Senator Stephanie Flowers’ contribution to a debate surrounding the “Stand Your Ground” bill using the [USA Today article](#).

Share the music video for “[Conversation with Senator Flowers](#)” by Jerome Jennings, and discuss Jennings’ fusion of speech and music. Utilize **Activity Sheet 2** for students to examine songs that incorporate famous speeches (vet lyrics to determine appropriateness for your students).

Career Readiness, Life Literacies & Key Skills
9.4.5.IML.4

Social & Emotional Learning Competencies
Self-Awareness

Social Studies
6.1.12.CivicsPI.14.a, 6.1.12.HistorySE.14.a

Visual & Performing Arts
Anchor Standard 8, 9

O

Originate

Have students reflect on their own lives and what art could be inspired by their experiences. Have them decide which art form they will use to tell their life story, and begin the brainstorming process.

Visual & Performing Arts
Anchor Standard 1, 2, 10, 11

Social & Emotional Learning Competencies
Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, Responsible Decision-Making

R

Rehearse

Give students time to continue developing their creation. If time allows, let them develop their projects on their own, then break the class out into small groups to discuss their ideas and receive additional ideas from peers. As they are working, use this time to walk around and ask them each about their project, the materials they are using, and what inspired them.

Visual & Performing Arts
Anchor Standard 2, 5, 7

Social & Emotional Learning Competencies
Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills

M

Mix it all together!

Once everyone is done, come to an agreement as a class on how it would be best to share what everyone’s been working on. Allow each student to present their work, discussing their research and what inspired them. Remind students to be respectful of one another. Between presentations, allow two or three students to describe their reactions to the work that was presented. Encourage them to use phrases like “It reminded me of _____” or “It made me feel _____” rather than describing the project as good or bad.

Visual & Performing Arts
Anchor Standard 5, 6, 7, 8

Social & Emotional Learning Competencies
Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, Responsible Decision-Making

curriculum standards

English Language Arts

W.AW.9.10.1.

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient textual and non-textual evidence

Career Readiness, Life Literacies & Key Skills

9.4.5.IML.4

Determine the impact of implicit and explicit media messages on individuals, groups, and society as a whole.

Social Emotional Learning Competencies

Relationship Skills

Relationship skills: communicating effectively

Responsible Decision Making

Recognizing how critical thinking skills are useful both inside and outside of school; Identifying solutions for personal and social problems; Learning how to make a reasoned judgment after analyzing information, data, and facts; demonstrating curiosity and open-mindedness

Self-Awareness

Integrating personal and social identities; identifying one’s emotions; Linking feelings, values and thoughts

Self-Management

Understand and practice strategies for managing one’s own emotions, thoughts and behaviors

Social-Awareness

Taking others’ perspectives;
Showing concern for the feelings of others

Social Studies

6.1.12.CivicsPI.14.a

Draw from multiple perspectives to evaluate the effectiveness and fairness of the processes by which local, state, and national officials are elected

6.1.12.HistorySE.14.a

Explore the various ways women, racial and ethnic minorities, the LGBTQ community, and individuals with disabilities have contributed to the American economy, politics and society.

Visual & Performing Arts

Anchor Standard 1

Conceptualizing and generating ideas

Anchor Standard 2

Organizing and developing ideas

Anchor Standard 5

Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation

Anchor Standard 6

Convey meaning through presentation of artistic work

Anchor Standard 7

Perceiving and analyzing products

Anchor Standard 8

Applying criteria to evaluate products

Anchor Standard 9

Interpret intent and meaning

Anchor Standard 10

Synthesizing and relating knowledge and personal experiences to create products.

Anchor Standard 11

Relating artistic ideas and works within societal, cultural, and historical contexts to deepen understanding.

additional resources

NJPAC

About NJPAC

njpac.org/about

NJPAC’s Arts Education programs

njpac.org/arts-education

NJPAC’s David G. Berger Master Class Series

njpac.org/berger

Jerome Jennings & iLL Philosophy Activity Sheets

njpac.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/JeromeJennings_ActivitySheets.pdf

Websites

Jerome Jennings Website

jeromejennings.com

Jerome Jennings Biography

jeromejennings.com/bio-1

Elements of Jazz

hancockinstitute.org/media/Grade-4-6-JIA-Synopsis-2-Elements-of-Jazz.pdf

USA Today | Arkansas Senator Stephanie Flowers’ ‘Stand Your Ground’ Speech Goes Viral

usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2019/03/08/arkansas-sen-stephanie-flowers-stand-your-ground-speech-goes-viral/3108568002

Interview with Jerome Jennings

openskyjazz.com/2019/12/jerome-jennings-drumming-man

Zildjian Blog | Jerome Jennings

zildjian.com/blogs/artist/jerome-jennings?srsId=AfmBOor7bp_Fk3LESuNLbg6muNm49gsMSYVhbmHdcRMQa3XQqb5wFb8T

History of Jazz Education

jazzinamerica.org/JazzResources/JazzEducation/Page

Black Lives Matter Movement

blacklivesmatter.com

Me Too Movement

metoomvmf.org

Jerome Jennings Instagram

instagram.com/iamjeromejennings

Jerome Jennings Facebook

facebook.com/p/Jerome-Jennings-100046444195395

The Jazz Session Podcast #508: Jerome Jennings

thejazzsession.com/2020/02/05/the-jazz-session-508-jerome-jennings

Videos

“In the Mood” by Glenn Miller, jazz standard

youtu.be/aME0qvhZ37o?si=wOrN2CI3E4Iv7qVR

The Beast by Jerome Jennings

youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy_kWl0mLiNjr3XawkZtHeyMxv4kW93LXC6c&si=X8x89coQLstpcweh

Solidarity by Jerome Jennings

youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy_mCZf1yaiFOJFNAvK1iwr9MSWgGuD2k_w&si=WwCBUGF_JSSgzBGT

Jerome Jennings & iLL Philosophy Live in NYC 2025

youtu.be/gYrn4RJxhxg?si=ipfSRqDbgx5ZjfET

National Museum of American History | “What is Jazz?”

youtu.be/BMgKXbtQwoo?si=GvgBDaO4akwRiP47

Jerome Jennings Instagram video

instagram.com/reel/DFO7Jm2AhSn/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

Solidarity by Jerome Jennings, electronic press kit

youtu.be/3dhuJ95Zml0?si=kcs7k01rJaLHw4tY

“Conversation with Senator Flowers” by Jerome Jennings

youtu.be/aukbtVWwEAY?si=Ik5m-BEqzKJdG8Y2

Jazz at Lincoln Center’s Jazz Academy

youtube.com/@JazzAcademy

History of Essential Jazz Drum Grooves

youtu.be/8uCeOkDeL90?si=uCxcOdEnjAm_N1WK

Interview with Jazz Drummer, Composer & Educator

Jerome Jennings on the 2019 CD *Solidarity*

youtu.be/qxgfh8QsshA?si=nboj4SE3dx0EhbPr

NowThis Impact | Lawmaker Goes Off

On ‘Stand Your Ground’ Bill

youtu.be/YwDW9ZKSJMs?si=EVnlYjxctdMe8DbT

Additional Music

Common Feat. Will.I.Am – A Dream

youtu.be/avbNOjCOHJE?si=A6dlzme7ZzudcsdR

Muse – JFK + Defector

youtu.be/kzbFxLNpguM?si=Kjqx6doyDAnZo_j7

Beyoncé Feat. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie – Flawless

youtu.be/r23T9O28b50?si=eyaY34kaAuOqDxLv

The 1975 – The 1975

youtu.be/4fwEG8XK1uU?si=WFs-fhsvqay1KQv2

Books

At the Dark End of the Street by Danielle L. McGuire. 2010

bring the arts to your school

In-School Residencies

NJPAC teaching artists come right to your school to teach the performing arts to your students. Our super-flexible in-person residencies are designed to meet your needs and you'll have a dedicated program manager to help you every step of the way. It's the perfect program to keep your students creating, connecting and expressing themselves through the magic of the arts.

Professional Development

Calling all educators! Expand your teaching skills, deepen your curriculum and give yourself a creative boost in NJPAC's forward-thinking professional development workshops. Our virtual PD programs are for teachers all the way from pre-K to high school and include hip hop, dance, storytelling, theater, music and more. Not only will you learn something... you'll also have fun and be inspired.

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+ deceased