

Miles Davis, *So What*
Eddie Jefferson, *So What*
Marcus Miller, *So What*

What is Cool? - Middle school level, grades 6-8

Objectives:

1. The student will identify cool jazz elements in the music of Miles Davis.
2. The student will contrast the music of Miles Davis with the art of Miles Davis.
3. The student will learn the story behind some jazz critics' dislike of Miles Davis.
4. The student will contrast the Marcus Miller version of *So What* with the Miles Davis recording.

Optional Objectives:

1. The student will explore the *Ken Burns Jazz* website and discover how Miles Davis changed jazz.
2. The student will journal about their thoughts about Miles Davis and his music.

Time: Two or three class periods.

Materials Required for Objectives:

Computer access to Internet recordings. Speakers for playback for class or individual headphones for students to listen on their own. "Cool Jazz and Cool Art?" worksheet. "Comparing Two Songs" worksheet." Optional: journal.

Procedure:

Activity 1 – "Jazz musician Miles Davis was the coolest of the cool. He was so cool that he invented a style of jazz called cool jazz. He often played with his back turned to the audience so he could focus more on his band and sometimes would leave the stage when he wasn't playing. The jazz critics at first did not like him because they thought he was rude. Soon it was obvious that he was a genius and the greatest musicians wanted to play and record with him. He is responsible for innovating several styles of jazz and influencing countless musicians who played with him and listened closely to him. Listen to this famous Miles Davis recording and think about why you think it might be labeled as cool jazz." Play recording and then ask students to discuss why they thought it was cool jazz. What did they hear in the music that sounded like it would fit the cool style description?

Activity 2 - "Miles Davis was also a painter. He created many paintings and you can look at a few on the web at this address: <http://www.milesdavis.com/home.htm>. Once you get to this web page, click on the art button to the left. Do you think his paintings are in the cool style? How do his paintings look like the music he played and composed? Use the "Cool Jazz and Cool Art?" worksheet.

Activity 3 - “Listen now to another version of *So What*. This one is sung by jazz singer Eddie Jefferson. Jefferson liked to create lyrics to go with famous improvised solos by instrumental jazz musicians. Jefferson created lyrics to the solo Miles Davis played on *So What* and described how the critics thought Davis and tenor saxophonist John Coltrane were perceived to be rude when they left the stage after they finished their improvised solos. This style of putting words to improvised solos was invented by Jefferson and is called vocalese. *So What* is one of his best known vocalese recordings. Be ready to discuss the story about Miles Davis with the class.” Play the recording, then discuss.

Activity 4 – “Now we are going to listen to another version of *So What* by a younger musician, bass player Marcus Miller.” Use the “Comparing Two Songs” worksheet to compare similarities and differences in the two versions of *So What*. “Do you think Miles Davis would like Marcus Miller’s version of *So What*? Do you think the Marcus Miller version is cool jazz? Why or why not? If it isn’t what style of jazz do you think it might be?”

Optional Activities:

Activity 5 - Go to this web site and listen and read about Miles Davis http://www.pbs.org/jazz/biography/artist_id_davis_miles.htm. What can you find out about the recording *So What* and the album it was originally on, *Kind of Blue*?

Activity 6 –“ Journal about your thoughts about Miles Davis the man and his music. Do you like his music? Whom do you listen to now that you think might have been influenced by Miles Davis, either through music, art, or his attitude? Why? “

Extension:

Show video of Miles Davis performing *So What* from the DVD/video *The Miles Davis Story*.

Indicators of Success:

Students can describe Miles Davis’s style and contrast it with his art and the music of Marcus Miller, a former bass player and record producer for Miles Davis.

Learn more about Miles Davis:

<http://www.milesdavis.com/home.htm>

http://www.pbs.org/jazz/biography/artist_id_davis_miles.htm

Learn more about Eddie Jefferson:

<http://www.ralf.org/~colomon/vocalese/jefferson.html>

<http://www.gallery41.com/JazzArtists/EddieJefferson.htm>

http://www.aaregistry.com/african_american_history/1057/Eddie_Jefferson_sang_early_vocales
e

Learn more about Marcus Miller:

<http://www.prarecords.com/artists/miller/>

<http://www.soundonsound.com/sos/jul99/articles/marcus.htm>

<http://www.soulwalking.co.uk/Marcus%20Miller.html>

Video Resource:

The Miles Davis Story. DVD and VHS, 125 mins. Columbia Music Video/Legacy, 2001.

Bibliography:

Ron Frankl, *Miles Davis*. New York: Chelsea House, 1995. Grades 5-6.