

Lesson Plan

Modern Biographies

Book: *Duke Ellington*

Series: Black Voices on Race

Level: Navigator

Objective

To help students practice researching and writing biographies of modern creators whose work highlights or advances social justice, using a nonfiction book about a musician from the past as a guide.

Supplies

- *Duke Ellington* book
- Computer access for students

Before the Activity

Read through the *Duke Ellington* book, or assign it to students to read on their own.

Activity

During his long and successful career as a musician, Duke Ellington often faced discrimination. But he used music as a way to fight racism and segregation, challenge stereotypes, celebrate Black culture and creativity, and work toward social justice.

Ask each student to research and write a biography of someone who is challenging discrimination and supporting social justice today. This person can be a musician, visual artist, or other type of creator. Like the *Duke Ellington* book, students' biographies should include the following elements:

- An introduction highlighting how and why the person is important and/or influential
- A section describing the person's early life
- A section describing how the person's career began
- A section describing the person's best-known or most influential work
- A conclusion describing the person's legacy, or the changes their work created

At the end of the essay, students should cite at least three sources. These sources can be print books or online resources, but they should be from reputable organizations (such as museums or newspapers), not Wikipedia or personal blogs.

Evaluation

Collect the biographies, and give each student up to 14 points:

- 1 point for choosing a person whose work has a clear connection to social justice
- 2 points for starting with a relevant and engaging introduction
- 2 points for a clear summary of the person's early life
- 2 points for a clear description of how the person's career began
- 2 points for identifying and describing the person's key work
- 2 points for ending with a conclusion summarizing the person's legacy
- 1 point for choosing three reputable sources
- 1 point for citing these sources at the end of the essay
- 1 point for writing that is relatively free from errors

Standards

This lesson may be used to address the Common Core State Standards' writing standards, grade 5 (W 5.4, 5.7, 5.8).