

APOLLO EDUCATION

Educator Resource Guide

This Apollo Educator Resource Guide includes materials that are specifically aligned to the content in our School Tour Programs and Workshops. Feel free to make activity modifications to best satisfy the needs, skills, and interests of your students. Whether you have brought your students to the Apollo for a School Tour or an Apollo Teaching Artist has visited your school to engage students in a workshop, this guide will help you extend and deepen the impact of our programs alongside your classroom curriculum.

Included in the guide:

- Key Terms
- Suggested Activities
- Discussion Topics
- Print and internet resources
- Connecting to Academic Content Standards



SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES FOR CONNECTING YOUR CLASSROOM CURRICULUM TO

THE SOUL OF AMERICAN CULTURE!



Try this:: Take your students on a tour of your school's theater, auditorium, gym, or other spaces used for performances and large gatherings. Compare and contrast that environment to other theaters, performance venues, or entertainment arenas that your students have seen on television, in movies, or have visited. What is the same? What is different? What kinds of activities take place in these spaces? How are these activities similar or different to the activities that take place in major theaters like the Apollo?

Landmark Collection

The Apollo Theater received national, state, and city landmark status in 1983. It earned this noteworthy recognition for the neo-classical design of the building, the significant cultural and political history of the Theater, and for being the oldest functioning theater in Harlem.

Try this: Conduct research with your students to assemble a collection of New York City landmarks. Students can construct dioramas or they can illustrate each landmark's exterior and interior design -- the options are limitless!

What Makes You Laugh?

Comedy has always been an important form of entertainment on the Apollo stage. Comedic innovators such as Jackie "Moms" Mabley paved the way for contemporary comedians such as Chris Rock and Whoopi Goldberg. Mabley used costumes to create a sassy, irreverent grandmother-like character named "Moms." Mabley's comedic personae often wore an older woman's housecoat, bedroom slippers, a wig, and a floppy hat. Audiences loved hearing "Moms" tell jokes and share stories about her life. Mabley's hilarious "Moms" was beloved by audiences and made Mabley a frequent performer at the Apollo for many decades.

Activities

Variety Show

The 125th Street Apollo Theater opened in 1934 with the variety show *Jazz a la Carte*. The performance featured a variety of live acts including dancers, musicians, comedians, singers, and an orchestra. The Master of Ceremonies was entertainer Ralph Cooper, who was also the creator and host of *Amateur Night at the Apollo*.

Try this: In the tradition of the Apollo's opening performance, develop a variety show with your students. Involve families and peers by having your students perform their variety show at a family night or during a school assembly.

Tour a Theater

The Apollo Theater can be transformed for different types of performances and events. The Theater's seats are removable and the stage can accommodate large sets, screens, and risers. A theatrical performance or event can be enhanced with a variety of lighting, sound, and visual effects.



Try this: Have your students learn a joke or prepare an amusing story to share with the class. Each student should have a costume prop to help them invent a different personality from their own. A funny hat, a pair of pants, or a dress that is too big or too small are examples. Students should first try sharing their joke or story as themselves. Afterwards, students should repeat their joke while wearing their costume pieces. Invite students to explore how costumes can change how the way an audience responds to comedic content.



Bearden, Romare. Empress of the Blues. 1974. Collage with acrylic and lacquer on board. Art © Romare Bearden Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

Research an Apollo Performer

The Apollo Theater has hosted a variety of entertainers and art forms on its stage. Instruct your students to use Google or YouTube to search an [entertainer](#) who performed at the Apollo. Ask students to find essential information such as the person's creative inspirations, personal history, cultural impact, and performance experiences. Students can share what they have learned about their artist by creating a performance, writing a research paper, or developing a media/art project.

Call and Response

Romare Bearden was an American painter who grew up in Harlem during the Harlem Renaissance. In addition to being a major force in local cultural and political scenes, he was also an avid jazz fan who

Key Terms

- Theater
- Variety Show
- Traditions
- Master of Ceremonies
- Performance
- Amateur
- Entertainment
- Audience
- Performer/entertainer
- History
- Legend
- Legacy
- Landmark
- Stage
- Front of House
- Backstage
- Dressing Rooms
- Genres
- Revue
- Renaissance
- Migration
- Segregation
- Diversity
- Community

was inspired by music. In 1941, Bearden moved his studio to 243 West 125th Street in a space located above the Apollo Theater¹. As he heard sounds from rehearsals and performances, Bearden would often concentrate on the "silences between the notes." His artistic technique was a visual "call-and-response," modeled after the music of performers such as Cab Calloway and Ella Fitzgerald. Each sound from the Apollo stage called out to Bearden, and he would respond with his brushes, art materials, and his imagination.

Try this: Using Romare Bearden's inspired approach to art, explain to your students that they are going to create art in the same way that Bearden did. Instruct students to listen to the music and create expressively in response to the sounds they hear. Ask guiding questions. Instruct them to use their imaginations. How does the music make them feel? What emotions does the music evoke? What images, shapes, or colors can they use to represent their emotions? Which colors might represent a saxophone playing? What gestures or movement would represent a piano softly playing. What expressive qualities do they hear in the music - dynamics (loud or soft) or tempo (fast or slow); Provide your students with a variety of art materials and instructional art techniques. Allow your students to explore their preferred medium and technique.



Poetry: Your Community

Explore poems about neighborhoods with your students. Some suggestions are: ***I Remember Harlem*** by Maxine Spence, ***The Heart of Harlem*** by Langston Hughes, ***Harlem*** by Walter Dean Myers, or ***Harlem Hopscotch*** by Maya Angelou. Have a class discussion about your school's neighborhood and the communities in which your students live. Are there similarities or differences? How do students feel when they think about these neighborhoods? What makes a neighborhood unique? Keep a running list of student observations. Ask students to use the list for inspiration to create their own neighborhood poems.

Discussion Topics

- **Audience etiquette** ensures a positive theater-going experience. Guide your students to understand and practice behaviors that indicate when someone is being a good audience member.
- All artists who have performed on the world-famous Apollo Theater stage first started with a personal dream. Talk with your students about their own **dreams**. What will it take for your students to achieve the goals that are most important to them?
- Some people are surprised to learn that the theater that would eventually become the Apollo Theater, first

opened as a segregated all-white theater, called Hurtig and Seamon's New Burlesque Theater. **Segregation** was prominent in New York City and other northern urban areas, and in neighborhoods like Harlem. Ask students to consider what life might have been like living in segregated communities, neighborhoods, and cities.

- As World War I began, there was an increasing need for people to contribute to the war effort. These jobs paid well and were very attractive to Black Americans who wanted to earn more than they could earn in the South. The movement of Black Americans to Northern cities between 1915 and 1919 was called the **Great Migration**. The influx of Black Americans to New York City, and Harlem specifically, allowed people with diverse viewpoints, experiences, and talents to develop a close urban community. This era during the 1920s was called the **Harlem Renaissance**. Ask your students to consider what it would be like to move from one community to another. What kinds of situations might they encounter? What kind of feelings might they experience?
- The **Great Depression** dramatically changed the entertainment landscape throughout New York City, especially in Harlem. During the early 1930s, several of the most popular bars, clubs, and lounges that featured Black performers closed; former patrons had less money

to spend on entertainment; and those dealing with unemployment, food shortages, and other daily perils struggled with low morale. When the Apollo Theater opened in 1934, the Theater quickly became a popular and affordable entertainment destination for New Yorkers of all races, class backgrounds, and experiences. Ask students to consider why the Apollo might have been a welcomed addition to the Harlem community.

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- The **Chitlin' Circuit** was the nickname for a network of performing venues that were part of the Theater Owners Booking Agency (TOBA). Many Black American performers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries moved their way through the Circuit to develop their craft by performing for new and old fans. The Apollo Theater joined the Circuit in 1934 when the Theater's new management team started to present variety shows featuring Black American entertainers. Have your students learn more about the

Chitlin' Circuit. Create a list of other venues that were part of the Circuit and map them. Students can imagine or research what a Black American performer's life might have been like while touring the country and performing for diverse audiences. For example, Black performers such as singers Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday often had to travel through the segregated South. What situations and social dynamics might they have experienced?

- During the 1960s, the Apollo Theater was a popular venue for **civil rights** fundraisers. In 1962, a benefit was held to raise funds for the Southern Student Freedom Fund, and in 1963, A. Phillip Randolph coordinated a fundraiser for the Historic March on Washington². Invite your students to consider why the Apollo Theater was involved in efforts to raise money for civil rights. Offer your students an opportunity to present social issues or concerns for which they would like to raise money, bring attention to, or encourage support.



Additional Resources

INTERNET

APOLLO THEATER HISTORY

<https://www.apollotheater.org/about/history>

APOLLO THEATER INTERACTIVE TIMELINE

<http://www.biography.com/tv/classroom/apollo-theater-timeline>

DROP ME OFF IN HARLEM

Discover the themes and works that emerged during the Harlem Renaissance

<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/interactives/harlem/>

HONOR!

A celebration of the African American Cultural Legacy - curated by Jessye Norman

<http://www.carnegiehall.org/honor/history/index.aspx>

ROMARE BEARDEN FOUNDATION

<http://www.beardenfoundation.org/>

BOOKS – General

Ain't Nothing Like the Real Thing: How the Apollo Theater Shaped American Entertainment. Edited by Richard Carlin and Kinshasha Holman Conwill (Smithsonian Books, 2010)

Amateur Night at the Apollo. By Ralph Cooper and Steve Dougherty (HarperCollins, 1990)

The Black New Yorkers. By Howard Dodson, Christopher Moore, and Roberta Yancy (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2000)

Forever Harlem: Celebrating America's Most Diverse Community. Edited by Voza W. Rivers and Lloyd A. Williams (Spotlight Press, 2006)

Harlem Heyday. By Jack Schiffman (Prometheus Books, 1984)

Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900-1968. Edited by Allon Schoener (The New Press, 2007)

Showtime at the Apollo: The Story of Harlem's World Famous Theater. By Ted Fox (Mill Road Enterprises, 2003)

Uptown: The Story of Harlem's Apollo Theatre. By Jack Schiffman (Cowles Book Co., 1971)

BOOKS – Students

Be a Friend: The Story of African American Music in Song, Words, & Pictures. By Leatha Stanley, Author and Henry Hawkins, Illustrator (Zino Press Children's Books, 1994)

Harlem. By Walter Dean Myers, Author and Christopher A. Myers, Illustrator (Scholastic Press, 1997)

Harlem Stomp!: A Cultural History of the Harlem Renaissance. By Laban Carrick Hill (Little, Brown, and Company, 2003)

How Does the Show Go On: An Introduction to Theater. By Thomas Schumacher and Jeff Kurti (Disney Editions, 2007)

Uptown by Byron Collier (Henry Holt & Company, 2000)

Connecting to Academic Content Standards

The Apollo School Tour Programs align to the following Academic Content Standards:

1. New York State Social Studies Standards

- a. US, NY, and NYC history
- b. Harlem Renaissance
- c. Segregation
- d. Great migration
- e. Civil Rights Movement
- f. Landmarks

2. Blueprints For Teaching and Learning in the Arts

- a. History of American music
- b. Performing arts activities

3. Common Core State Standards

- a. Speech & Listening
- b. Language
- c. Reading
- d. Writing



Photo credits

Page 1, Azran, Shahr. Apollo Exterior, 2008. Photograph. Apollo Theater Foundation, New York.

Page 2, Apollo Yesterday. Photograph. Apollo Theater Foundation, New York; Jackie "Moms" Mabley. Photograph. Apollo Theater Foundation Archive, New York. (Replicated from publicity photograph and colorized)

Page 3, Bearden, Romare. Empress of the Blues. 1974. Collage with acrylic and lacquer on board. Art © Romare Bearden Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

Page 4, Harlem Street Scene. Photograph. National Archives, Washington, DC. photo no. 306-PS-50-4743

Page 5, United States Information Agency [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

Page 6, Azran, Shahr. Apollo Theater (Interior). Photograph. Apollo Theater Foundation, New York.

Endnotes

1 Romare Bearden in the Classroom: Educator's Guide. New York: Romare Bearden Foundation, 2007. Print.

2 Ain't Nothing Like the Real Thing: How the Apollo Theater Shaped American Entertainment. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2010. Print.

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