

ELLINGTON WAS NOT A STREET

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by Ntozake Shange, ill. by Kadir Nelson

Ages: 7-11

Themes: U.S. History, African American History, Race, Overcoming Obstacles, Role Models

Running Time: 12 minutes

SUMMARY

In simple, reflective language, this movie pays tribute to some of the most influential cultural and political African American leaders of the twentieth century. Students are introduced to Paul Robeson, W.E.B. DuBois, Ray Baretto, Sonny Til, Dizzy Gillespie, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, Virgil Akins, the Clovers, and of course, Duke Ellington. Told through the eyes of a young girl growing up in a home which embraced these men and their revolutionary thoughts, the beautiful and flowing imagery captures her awe of both their power and their gentleness. Set in a time when race determined even the most mundane parts of life, this movie shows how these men overcame tremendous adversity to become examples and inspirations for generations to come. This is a wonderful program to simultaneously honor and pique students' interests in the richness of the African American community and notable African American figures of the twentieth century.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will identify Black cultural and political leaders.
- Students will understand the political and cultural climate of the United States in the 1950s, with regard to relations between racial groups.
- Students will make connections between the movie and their own experiences.

BEFORE VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Show the title frame of the movie or the cover of the book. Ask students to make predictions about what the movie is about based on the picture on the title frame.

Guiding questions:

- What or who is Ellington if it is not a street?
- Who do you think this movie will be about?
- What other observations can you make about this opening title frame that will help you make predictions about the movie?

Elicit students' background knowledge about race relations in the 1950s. Guiding questions:

- How were blacks and whites treated differently in the past than they are now?
- What is segregation?
- What are some examples of segregation in the past?
- What led to the end of segregation?

Provide visual images of segregation. Discuss with students why segregation was not fair. Discuss ways that people overcame the constraints of segregation to become cultural and political leaders. Ask students to share experiences from their lives of times when they or others they know have felt left out or excluded because of their skin color, gender or any other physical feature that they have no control over. Discuss how this made students feel and how they dealt with these situations.

AFTER VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Summarize the movie with the students.

Guiding questions:

- What was this story about?
- Who were the main characters in the story?
- Why do you think the little girl looked up to the men in the story so much?
- How does the title relate to the message of the story?

Help students make text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections about the movie.

Guiding questions:

- What parts of the movie remind you of your life, your family, or experiences you have had? Why?
- What parts of the movie remind you of other stories you have read or movies you have seen? Why?

- What parts of the movie remind you of things you have seen or heard about happening in the world? Why?

Have each student research and create a biographical poster about one of the people featured in the movie. Help students do both book and internet research to find facts about the person's life and accomplishments. Students should display their facts along with an illustration of the person on a poster. These posters should be presented to the class. Guiding questions/suggestions:

- Find out basic facts about the person's life (full name and nickname, dates of birth and death, cultural or political contribution).
- How did this person overcome societal obstacles to gain recognition and break down racial stereotypes?
- What lessons can be learned from this person's life?

Discuss role models with students. Have students write an essay about a role model that they have and why that person is their role model. Guiding questions/suggestions:

- What kinds of qualities do you look for in a role model?
- What does it mean to set a good example?
- What kinds of qualities would rule someone out of being a role model?
- Why are role models important?
- Who is your role model? Why?

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