



ELLA JANE FITZGERALD was born April 25, 1917 in Newport News, Virginia. Her father, William Fitzgerald, drove a wagon. Her mother, Temperance Fitzgerald, was a laundress.

When Ella was a baby William left the family. Then her mother fell in love with Joseph Da Silva, an immigrant from Portugal. They all moved to Yonkers, New York, where Temperance worked as a laundress and Joseph worked in the sugar refinery. Soon Ella's half-sister, Frances, was born.

In September 1923, Ella began attending Public School #10. When she started dancing in third grade, Ella told her friends that she was going to be a famous dancer some day. Little did she know that she'd become a famous singer instead! Ella sang and danced her way to and from Benjamin Franklin Junior High School. She developed her singing skills at the Bethany African Methodist Episcopal Church.

In 1932, Ella's sunny life took a tragic turn when her mother died suddenly from a heart attack. Ella went to live with her Aunt Virginia and cousin Georgie (short for Georgiana) in Harlem. She became really close friends with her cousin. After Joseph Da Silva died of a heart attack, Ella's half-sister, Frances, moved in with Aunt Virginia, too.

Because she often skipped school, Ella was transferred to a reform school. Ella was very unhappy there so she ran away in 1934. Because she was afraid the authorities would find her at Aunt Virginia's house, she decided to live on the streets instead.

Throughout these troubled years Ella and her friend, Charles Gulliver, danced in various clubs. Because Harlem attracted many musicians and dancers, Ella and Charles often rode a trolley and subway to 125th Street to watch performing artists like Earl "Snake Hips" Tucker. They took the newest dance moves back to their neighborhood to practice with their friends. By the age of 16, Ella was dancing on the streets of Harlem to earn money to survive.

Everything changed dramatically when Ella entered the Amateur Night competition at the Apollo Theater in Harlem. After the main show every Wednesday, amateurs competed for the honor of appearing onstage the following week. On November 21, 1934, the Edwards Sisters, a dancing team, were the main attraction. Although Ella originally planned to dance, she changed her mind because the Edwards Sisters had danced so well. Instead, she sang two songs, *The Object of My Affection* and *Judy*, in the manner of Connee Boswell, a popular singer of the day. The audience loved her voice so much that she won the first prize. Ella wasn't allowed to perform the following week, though, because of the way she was dressed in secondhand clothes and men's boots.



ELLA HAD AN EXTRAORDINARY three-octave range, perfect pitch, flawless diction, and a good sense of rhythm. Chick Webb, a famous band leader and jazz drummer, agreed to make Ella a permanent part of his band. Ella began to believe in herself, too! In 1935, she made her first recording, of the song *Love and Kisses*. By the time she was 20 years old, Ella was already becoming a legend in Harlem. In 1937, readers of *Down Beat* magazine voted Ella the top female singer. On June 18, 1938, *A-Tisket, A-Tasket* (a song Ella co-wrote with Van Alexander) debuted at number ten on the charts and went on to become her first million-seller! *A-Tisket, A-Tasket* was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame in 1986.

After Chick Webb died of complications from spinal tuberculosis on June 16, 1939, his band was renamed "Ella Fitzgerald and Her Famous Orchestra." They eventually went their separate ways in 1942. On Friday, December 26, 1941, Ella married a man named Benny Kornegay. The marriage was annulled a few months later.

Ella toured with trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie's band and began singing bebop, a new form of jazz. Dizzy encouraged her to try scatting, a form of music where the singer uses nonsense syllables and tries to sound like a musical instrument. *Flying Home*, recorded in 1945, is considered a masterpiece of scat singing, and Ella's recording of *Lady Be Good* is also noted for her scatting. In 1947, Ella married Ray Brown, a bassist. They adopted a child, Ray Brown, Jr., before divorcing in 1953.

In the late 1940s Ella began touring with Norman Granz's Jazz at the Philharmonic troupe. As her manager, Granz helped Ella become an international concert artist. Because Norman insisted that people of all races be treated equally, Ella became the first black artist to appear in several exclusive clubs around the United States, including the Copacabana in New York in June 1957.

Ella became popular with generations of Americans by singing jazz, blues, pop, gospel, opera, Christmas songs, and Hollywood show tunes. From 1956-1964 Ella recorded a series of "songbook" albums featuring songs written by Cole Porter, Harold Arlen, Irving Berlin, Duke Ellington, Rodgers and Hart, George and Ira Gershwin, Jerome Kern, and Johnny Mercer. She toured worldwide, often for 40 weeks a year, with small ensembles and symphonic orchestras. She even appeared at Carnegie Hall 26 times! Ella recorded with many legendary artists, including Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Count Basie, Benny Goodman, Sarah Vaughan, and Nat King Cole. She also sang on two Frank Sinatra television specials, a Timex special, two BBC shows, and the Carol Burnett show. She made a KFC commercial and a series of Memorex commercials where she broke a glass with her voice. Ella also appeared in several films: *Ride 'Em Cowboy* (with Abbott and Costello in 1942), *Pete Kelly's Blues* (1955), *St. Louis Blues* (1958), and *Let No Man Write My Epitaph* (1960).



ALTHOUGH ELLA battled diabetes and heart disease in her later years, she continued to sing. She had to have both legs amputated below the knee in 1992, thus ending a performing career that had spanned six decades. She established the Ella Fitzgerald Charitable Foundation in 1993 and served as honorary chair of the Martin Luther King Foundation. Ella was beloved internationally when she died at home in Beverly Hills, California, on Saturday, June 15, 1996. She was entombed in the Sunset Memorial Garden Mausoleum at Inglewood Park Cemetery in Inglewood, California.

Ella left behind a legacy of magnificent music and amazing achievements. A collection of more than 10,000 pages of musical scores for more than 1,000 ensemble and symphonic arrangements were donated to the Library of Congress on April 24, 1997. She recorded more than 2,000 songs and sold over 40

million albums. Ella won several recognitions during her lifetime. She won 13 Grammys, including one for lifetime achievement in 1967. She won Kennedy Center Honors in 1979, the Peabody Award for Outstanding Contributions to Music in America (1983), the French Commandeur Des Arts et Lettres (1990), the Whitney M. Young, Jr. Award of the Los Angeles Urban League (1984), and the 1988 NAACP Image Award for Lifetime Achievement. In 1989, the Society of Singers created a lifetime achievement award named in her honor, the "Ella." She performed at President John F. Kennedy's inaugural gala on January 20, 1961. President Ronald Reagan presented Ella with the National Medal of Arts in 1987; President George H.W. Bush presented her with the Presidential Medal of Freedom on December 11, 1992.

Another aspect of Ella's wonderful legacy was her ability to maintain a positive, gracious attitude throughout her life. Michael L. Maliner wrote, "Fitzgerald was able to transcend circumstance and develop into one of the greatest musicians that America has ever produced. Musically, professionally, and personally, Ms. Fitzgerald was one-of-a-kind, an American treasure."



# IF DREAMS COME TRUE

**MATERIALS NEEDED:** computer with Internet access, printer, and speakers; copies of Ella Fitzgerald's biography (1 copy per pair); copies of *Ella's Match Game* activity page; yarn or tape; construction paper; notebook paper and pencils; video camera; *Amazing Grace* by Mary Hoffman (ISBN 0803710402).

## BEFORE WE BEGIN

Today we're going to start learning about a popular American musician, Ella Fitzgerald. Ella always dreamed she would become famous one day. Because of her patience, persistence, and positive attitude she made her dream come true. In fact, Ella became so famous that the United States Postal Service created a stamp to honor her, the 30th in a series of Black Heritage stamps. We're going to start our mini-unit by reading a story about another little girl who also dreamed big.

**READ** *Amazing Grace*. This is the story of a little girl who loves to act out stories. Although her friends tell her it's impossible for her to play the part of Peter Pan in the school play, her grandmother and mother encourage her to believe in herself.

**DISCUSS:** What is something you've accomplished that you never thought you could? Who helped you to believe in yourself? Give students time to think before sharing with a partner. Volunteers share with the class.

### ALL ABOUT ELLA

**1** Student pairs read sections of Ella's biography, one section per sitting. Fold lined notebook paper in half lengthwise. Entitle the two columns "noteworthy facts" and "reactions". As they read, students take turns writing facts about Ella's life in the left column and their personal reactions in the right column. After each section, have a whole-class grand conversation using the journal entries as discussion starters.

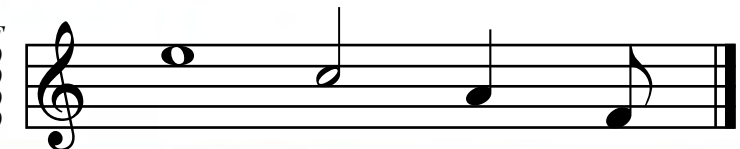
**2** Create a musical staff using yarn or tape across a wide span of classroom wall. Create musical notes out of construction paper. Students write note-worthy facts about Ella's life on the note-shapes. Use quarter notes and eighth notes for short-term events; use half and whole notes for events spanning longer periods of time. Create a musical timeline of Ella's life.

**3** Use the Internet to conduct research about Ella's career and additional notes to the class musical timeline. Visit these sites:  
<http://www.ella-fitzgerald.com/> (official website)  
<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0280228/photogallery> (pictures)  
[www.ellafitzgerald.com/about/music.html](http://www.ellafitzgerald.com/about/music.html) (list of all recordings)  
<http://museum.media.org/ella/misc/listen.html> (audio clips, interviews)  
<http://museum.media.org/ella/misc/listen.html> (timeline)

### SOME NOTES ON NOTES

Here is an example of a musical timeline. Encourage students to use bass or treble clefs and an assortment of notes. Noteworthy facts should be written on the round portion of each note.

**TREBLE CLEF**  
 whole note (E)  
 half note (C)  
 quarter note (A)  
 eighth note (F)



## before we begin

*Ella Fitzgerald was an amazing artist who shared her love for music verbally, visually, and musically. Whenever you're feeling especially emotional, how do you express your feelings? Invite student input. The next few days we're going to explore Ella's music using words, art, and movement.*



# I'M MAKING BELIEVE

**MATERIALS NEEDED:** computer with internet access and speakers; Ella Fitzgerald songs (CDs; albums; Internet [http://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=ella+fitzgerald](http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=ella+fitzgerald)); scarves or long pieces of cloth; paper and pencils; various art supplies; newspapers; paint shirts; *Dream Variation in The Dream Keeper and Other poems* by Langston Hughes (ISBN 059062396) or [http://www.poetseers.org/contemporary\\_poets/modern\\_poets/langston\\_hughes\\_poems/dream\\_variation/view](http://www.poetseers.org/contemporary_poets/modern_poets/langston_hughes_poems/dream_variation/view).

### Musical Lyrics

- Access this site: [www.smithsonianjazz.org/class/fitzgerald/ef\\_class\\_1.asp](http://www.smithsonianjazz.org/class/fitzgerald/ef_class_1.asp). The Smithsonian Museum has created a series of activities (with video clips) entitled *Ella's Singing Class*. In activity one, students make up new words to a nursery rhyme. For activity two, they replace the words from a nursery rhyme with nonsense syllables (scat). These activities would work well for a guided class activity or as a learning center.
- Students work in small groups to change the words of a popular, modern-day song to nonsense syllables. Practice then perform their efforts.
- Celebrate the lyrics of Ella's songs and songbooks by going to this site: <http://www.thepeaches.com/music/ella/>. **OPTION ONE:** Students select their favorite lyrics. They create and share a miniature sketch-to-stretch (abstract artwork depicting the theme of the lyrics) and a narrative describing the feelings and memories the lyrics evoke. **OPTION TWO:** Students select phrases from multiple songs to create "found poems." Display students' efforts.

### MUSICAL PORTRAITS

- Access this site: [www.smithsonianjazz.org/class/fitzgerald/ef\\_class\\_1.asp](http://www.smithsonianjazz.org/class/fitzgerald/ef_class_1.asp). The Smithsonian Museum has created a series of activities (with video clips) entitled *Ella's Singing Class*. In activity three, trumpeter Roy Eldridge and Ella take turns performing musical phrases. Students trace the melodic curves of their performances for a side-by-side comparison. For activity four, students guess which instrument Ella is replicating. These would work well as guided class activities.
- Create visual depictions of Ella's music. Cover students' desks with newspapers; cover their bodies with paint shirts. Provide students with multiple pieces of small paper and their choice of art materials: watercolors, tempera, acrylic paint, markers, pastels, or colored chalk. Play a selection of Ella Fitzgerald's songs. Encourage students to create abstract designs that reflect the mood and movement of the songs—one song per page. Create an art exhibit of students' favorite artworks.

### MUSICAL MOVEMENTS

- Read Langston Hughes' poem *Dream Variation*. Invite volunteers to act out the motions of the poem.
- To see how Ella moved while she was singing, view the video clips found at [http://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=ella+fitzgerald](http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=ella+fitzgerald).
- Play assorted Ella Fitzgerald songs. Distribute scarves or cloth. Students create their own physical movements in response to the melodies and rhythms. These will be done spontaneously and simultaneously, not performed *per se*.
- Have student teams select one Ella Fitzgerald song. Students create a set of dancercizes that can be done while listening to the music. Share with their classmates.

# THE BEST IS YET TO COME



**MATERIALS NEEDED:** assorted Ella Fitzgerald music; computer with speakers; CD player; student-provided (teacher-screened) modern CDs; lined notebook paper; pencils; various art supplies; whiteboard and markers.

## BEFORE WE BEGIN

Ella Fitzgerald's career began when she won Amateur Night at the Apollo Theatre. Many modern artists have begun their careers by winning competitions. How many of you have seen *So You Think You Can Dance*, *American Idol*, or *Nashville Star*? How do the judges and audience members decide which performer is the best? In the next few days, we are going to create our own Amateur Hour program!

### AMATEUR HOUR

- Students may perform individually or in small groups.
- Students decide whether they want to sing and/or dance to Ella Fitzgerald or modern music. The teacher screens their musical selections to be sure they are appropriate.
- Cooperatively determine the length and schedule of the performances. Decide if students want to perform for the joy of the experience or if they want to compete in a contest. As a group, establish performance criteria.
- Give students plenty of time to practice. Perform for the class. If desired, perform for parents or other classrooms.



- The ABCs of EF: List the letters of the alphabet down the left side of a piece of lined notebook paper. Students work independently or in pairs to write a word or phrase beginning with each letter. All entries must have something to do with Ella's life. Who can use the most letters?
- Play "Scat that Song". Student teams select Fitzgerald songs that classmates have become familiar with through unit activities. They create a clue related to the title of the song and prepare to "scat" (sing nonsense syllables) up to four song phrases. Teams rotate turns between being contestants and emcees. Emcees begin by giving the clue. Contestants predict how many scat phrases they will need to hear in order to name that song (0-4). Emcees sing the designated number of phrases (0-4). Contestants who guess correctly are awarded points as follows. Teams with the most points win.

### SCORING

- 0 phrases = 5 points
- 1 phrase = 4 points
- 2 phrases = 3 points

- 3 phrases = 2 points
- 4 phrases = 1 point
- Incorrect guess = 0 points

### CELEBRATE ELLA

- Ella Fitzgerald's songbooks, or collections of other composers' works, were extremely popular. Have student teams create a songbook of their favorite Fitzgerald songs. Which songs would they include? Why? Create an album cover. Student teams produce infomercials to "sell" their albums to classmate consumers.



*"I'm very shy, and I shy away from people. But the moment I hit the stage it's a different feeling. I get nerve from somewhere; maybe it's because I'm doing something I love to do."*

*Ella Fitzgerald*

**PHOTOS:** COVER: Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, used with permission of the Carl Van Vechten Trust.  
 ELLA IN NIGHTCLUB PHOTO, 2 PAGE SPREAD: Yale Joel/Time Life Pictures/Getty Images.  
 ALL OTHER PHOTOS AND LP COVERS: Ella Fitzgerald Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.  
 Biography and lesson plans created by Dr. Jacqueline Hansen, Murray State University. Project Manager: Jean Schlademan, Stamp Services, United States Postal Service. Design: Frank Schultz-DePalo, Public Affairs and Communications, United States Postal Service. Purchasing Specialist: George T. Huelsman, Supply Management, United States Postal Service. Photo Editor: Michael Owens, PhotoAssist, Inc.  
 FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT STAMPS AND STAMP PRODUCTS, VISIT THE POSTAL STORE AT [WWW.USPS.COM/SHOP](http://WWW.USPS.COM/SHOP) OR CALL 1-800-STAMP-24.  
 ©2006 United States Postal Service



January 10, 2007 First Day of Issue

