

Mitchell & Ruff

An American Profile in Jazz

by WILLIAM ZINSSER



Curriculum Guide by Marguerite McGlenn

MITCHELL & RUFF

An American Profile in Jazz *by* WILLIAM ZINSSER

Curriculum Guide by Marguerite McGlinn



PAUL DRY BOOKS
Philadelphia 2002

Marguerite McGlinn earned a master's degree in English from Villanova University. She is the editor of *The Trivium: The Liberal Arts of Logic, Grammar, and Rhetoric* (Paul Dry Books, 2002). Her short stories and essays have appeared in *English Journal*, the *New York Times*, the *Sun-Sentinel*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and the *Los Angeles Times*. She has written curriculum guides for two other Paul Dry Books: *Who Loves You Like This* and *The Parnas: A Scene from the Holocaust*. She is a former high school English teacher and department chair. She currently teaches college composition.

Copyright © 2002 Paul Dry Books, Inc.
Design: Adrienne Onderdonk Dudden
ISBN 1-58988-006-4

CONTENTS

A NOTE TO THE TEACHER 4

OBJECTIVES FOR THE UNIT 5

CLASS ACTIVITIES AND HANDOUTS

SUMMARY	<i>Mitchell & Ruff</i>	6
TEACHER NOTE	Start with the Music	8
TEACHER NOTE	Stay with the Music	9
TEACHER RESOURCE	Jazz Basics	10
TEACHER NOTE	“Shanghai”	11
STUDENT ACTIVITY	“My Lord, What a Morning”	12
▶ HANDOUT 1	“My Lord, What a Morning”	13
▶ HANDOUT 2	The Origins of Jazz	14
STUDENT ACTIVITY	Jazz: The Words	15
▶ HANDOUT 3	Special Languages	16
TEACHER NOTE	Biography	17
TEACHER NOTE	Shanghai Biography	18
TEACHER RESOURCE	Modern China	19
TEACHER NOTE	“Dunedin” and “Muscle Shoals”	20
STUDENT ACTIVITY	Considering Biography	21
▶ HANDOUT 4	“Demosthenes” from <i>Plutarch’s Lives</i>	22
▶ HANDOUT 5	“Boswell’s Introduction” from <i>Life of Johnson</i>	23
▶ HANDOUT 6	From Chapter Fourteen of <i>Lincoln</i> by David Herbert Donald	24
▶ HANDOUT 7	Considering Biography	25
STUDENT ACTIVITY	The Details in the Story	26
▶ HANDOUT 8	The Story in the Details	27
TEACHER NOTE	“Columbus” and “Davenport”	28
STUDENT ACTIVITIES	An American Story	29
▶ HANDOUT 9	“Columbus” and “Davenport”: The American Experience	30
TEACHER NOTE	People and Places of America	32
STUDENT ACTIVITIES	The Interview	33
STUDENT ACTIVITIES	Neighborhoods	34
▶ HANDOUT 10	The Interview	35
▶ HANDOUT 11	My Neighborhood	36
TEACHER NOTE	“New York” and “Venice”	37
STUDENT ACTIVITY	Themes and Motifs in <i>Mitchell & Ruff</i>	38

TEACHER NOTE	Bringing It Together	39
STUDENT ACTIVITY	The Final Note	40
STUDENT ACTIVITY	Unit Test	41
► HANDOUT 12	The Final Note: <i>Mitchell & Ruff</i>	42
► HANDOUT 13	Unit Test	43
TEACHER NOTE	My American Profile	44
STUDENT ACTIVITY	My American Profile	45
► HANDOUT 14	My American Profile	46
STUDENT ACTIVITY	The Jazz Age	47
► HANDOUT 15	The Jazz Age, 1918 to 1929	48
STUDENT ACTIVITY	The Jazz Quest	50
► HANDOUT 16	The Jazz Quest	51
► HANDOUT 17	Jazz Poetry	52
ASSESSMENT	Daily and Unit Assessments	55

LIST OF WORKS CONSULTED	57
--------------------------------	----

 A NOTE TO THE TEACHER

This curriculum guide for *Mitchell & Ruff: An American Profile in Jazz* by William Zinsser offers choices on class activities and assignments. Many of the activities use a cooperative model in which students first work individually, then meet in a group to share and to integrate information, and finally either report to the whole class or engage in a group discussion. The cooperative model allows students to check their own understanding and to increase their ability to think critically since they have many opportunities to engage in discussion and to produce a product relevant to their reading and discussion.

The *Mitchell & Ruff* curriculum guide also uses “Writing to Learn” techniques (see William Zinsser. *Writing to Learn*. New York: HarperCollins, 1989) that encourage students to use writing as a thinking tool as well as a presentation tool. Journal writing, in particular, allows students to list their questions, capture their first reactions, speculate on the significance of a written passage, or organize their approach to tasks.

Several of the final projects build on journal writing and other activities, which are embedded in the lesson plans. If the teacher reviews the range of final projects offered (My American Profile, The Jazz Age, Jazz Quest, and Jazz Poetry) and chooses one or two early in the unit, he or she will be able to focus the other activities toward that end. In some classes “The Jazz Age” might suit the class’s need because they are studying American history and are familiar with the Jazz Age. In another class, “The American Profile” might be a better match because students have writing portfolios, which focus on different types of autobiographical writing. The final projects could be expanded or contracted, and suggestions for both approaches are included in the Teacher Notes.

Both the English Standards, published by the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association, and the Teacher Standards for History, published by the National Council for Social Studies, were influences in creating this curriculum guide.

Lorene Carey, author and founder of Art Sanctuary, first suggested this curriculum guide for *Mitchell & Ruff*. Vera DaVinci, Collaborating Teacher for English Language Arts in the Philadelphia School District, and Kate Early, educational consultant and my former teaching colleague, assessed the guide for usefulness and clarity. I want to thank them for their contributions to this project. I would also like to thank the many students I have taught, whose energy and interest always fueled my interest in curriculum development.

OBJECTIVES FOR THE UNIT

- ❑ Students will actively engage with the text.
- ❑ Students will connect prior knowledge to new knowledge.
- ❑ Students will see the connection between art and history.
- ❑ Students will examine biography as a nonfiction genre.
- ❑ Students will engage in discussions on the American experience.
- ❑ Students use writing and other forms of expression to explore questions and to present both critical and creative responses.
- ❑ Students will extend their knowledge beyond the assigned text by posing questions and by doing research on the Internet and in print sources.
- ❑ Students will explore the creation of character in nonfiction texts.
- ❑ Students will develop an awareness of the many cultures that have contributed to American art.

SUMMARY *Mitchell & Ruff*

William Zinsser's biography of Dwiki Mitchell and Willie Ruff introduces two American men who seek out every opportunity to hone their artistry and to share their music, and it presents places connected to the history of Mitchell and Ruff. Zinsser begins and ends the book in foreign cities—Shanghai and Venice. American places occupy the middle.

Shanghai The Mitchell-Ruff Duo, the oldest continually performing American jazz duo, introduced jazz to China in 1981. Willie Ruff learned Mandarin so that he could speak directly to his Chinese audience at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. Dwiki Mitchell played the piano; Willie Ruff, the French horn and bass. The concept of improvising daunted the young conservatory students, and they were truly amazed when the duo improvised on an original composition performed by one of the students.

Dunedin Dwiki Mitchell lived in Dunedin, Florida, until he joined the army. From the age of five, he played the piano for the Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church. Teachers and townspeople noticed his talent and encouraged its growth, but the musical currents of the mid-twentieth century reached Dunedin only in a distant hum from the radio. Mitchell longed for a bigger world and found it, and formal musical training, in the army.

Muscle Shoals The towns of Sheffield and Florence, Alabama, make up Muscle Shoals. Willie Ruff was born in Sheffield and still has a home there. William Zinsser returned with him for a Mitchell-Ruff concert. Willie reminisced about a childhood spent in music. He came alive to rhythm at the Sanctified Church and heard live performances by many jazz greats who passed through Muscle Shoals on the train or via the Tennessee River. His white neighbor, Mutt McCord, played the drums, and Willie became his acolyte—learning from him, carrying his drums, and even sitting in a cotton field near the football field (black people were not allowed on the football field) to hear Mutt play in the school band.

Columbus Mitchell and Ruff finally met at the Lockbourne Air Force Base near Columbus, Ohio. Lockbourne served as a solution in the segregated Air Force; the elite black members were clustered there. John Brice, the bandmaster, was one of the elite, and he created an unofficial, but not informal, conservatory. There Dwiki and Willie learned technique through the music program on the base and from the many accomplished musicians attracted to the program.

Davenport William Zinsser accompanied The Mitchell-Ruff Duo to the Quad Cities along the Mississippi River. As performers in the Visiting Artists Series, they played at schools and public venues including a Rotary Club luncheon and the John Deere factory. They performed with the same energy and interest for elementary school students, college kids having lunch at the student union, conservatory students, and factory workers.

New York Dwiki Mitchell lives in New York while not on the road with Willie Ruff. His New York life revolves around practicing the piano and working with students. After leaving Lock-

bourne, he studied classical music at the Philadelphia Musical Academy on the G.I. Bill because he had heard Agi Jambor, the pianist, performing Bach with the Philadelphia Orchestra and knew he wanted to study with her. He spent three and a half years at the Philadelphia Musical Academy, and then he joined Lionel Hampton's band.

Venice Willie Ruff wanted to play his French horn in Saint Mark's Cathedral in Venice. After the army he had used the G.I. Bill to study classical music at Yale with Paul Hindemith, and he learned that polyphonic music began in Venice. Without a settled plan but with the weight of his Yale association (Willie Ruff was a professor at Yale), a tape recorder, and his French horn, he arrived in Venice. He played his horn at Stravinsky's grave on San Michele, the island cemetery for Venice. He met various sextons and monsignors and finally received permission to play when Saint Mark's was empty. William Zinsser captures that magical night inside the cathedral when Willie heard the true sound of his own music for the first time.

 **TEACHER NOTE** Start with the Music

Before students begin reading the book, the teacher brings a jazz recording to class. It can be a Mitchell-Ruff Duo release (their most recent CD is “Breaking the Silence” on the Kepler label) or a work from the other performers listed in this curriculum guide.

The teacher plays the music with no introduction and then asks the students for their reactions. Do they know the work? What are the qualities of the music? Can they identify the instruments? At some point when students seem ready, the teacher should play the music a second time.

Eventually, the word *jazz* will emerge in the discussion. Now is a good time to write. If students are accustomed to short writing opportunities to help them focus their thoughts and their questions, this aspect of the lesson will not need much introduction. Students can write in their notebooks or in a classroom journal if one is used in class.

The teacher can use a formal prompt if this is the usual method in the class. A few examples follow.

- ❑ What does the word *jazz* mean?
- ❑ What kind of music is jazz?
- ❑ What do you know about jazz?
- ❑ Write down everything you can about jazz in five minutes.
- ❑ What questions do you have about jazz?

When students finish writing, the teacher invites students to share what they have written. Some concepts or words (names of artists, attempts to define jazz, musical terms, etc.) should be listed on the board or newsprint. The teacher asks a student to make a record of the list so that the class can refer to it later in the unit.

 **TEACHER NOTE** **Stay with the Music**

The teacher plays a different jazz recording another day and asks students about the differences and similarities. Now is a good time to discover the music experts in the class. The school might have a jazz band, and some of the students might be members. Students might have their own collections of jazz recordings. Students might have parents who like jazz and play it at home. If there is any outside interest to build on, the teacher can use it during the unit.

After listening to the jazz number, the teacher initiates a general discussion of music. What kind of music do the students listen to? Who are the popular artists? Can they see any connection between the music they like and jazz? What is the difference between popular and classical music? Do they know of any crossovers? The discussion ends with journal writing.

Write down the name of a piece of music that you like. Describe the qualities of the music. What is the mood? Does it have a theme? What audience would like this music? How is it like other music of its kind? Is it popular? If so, why?

Bringing popular music into the classroom, either by playing recordings or through discussion, presents an immediate problem. The content of some popular music is not suitable for the classroom; it might be vulgar, insensitive to targeted groups of people, or too esoteric to have much value for classroom learning. In most schools the teacher will have to discuss this with the class and set some guidelines about the types of music that can be included in the classroom.

As the class begins the unit on *Mitchell & Ruff*, music can be a part of each class. Maybe the jazz band member will play for the class or arrange a duo or quartet to play for the class. Maybe students will bring recordings from their own collection. If these resources are not available, the teacher can supply the music. The Internet has many music sites. See the "List of Works Consulted" at the end of this guide.

TEACHER RESOURCE Jazz Basics**Types of Jazz**

Traditional
Big Band
Bebop
Cool
Blues
Mainstream
Vocal Jazz
Third Stream
Hard Bop
Progressive
World/Ethnic Styles
Avant-garde
Fusion
Crossover

Jazz Artists

Louis Armstrong
Chet Baker
Count Basie
Art Blakey
Clifford Brown
Dave Brubeck
Betty Carter
John Coltrane
Miles Davis
Duke Ellington
Ella Fitzgerald
Stan Getz
Dizzy Gillespie
Benny Goodman
Billie Holiday
Charles Mingus
Charlie Parker
Oscar Peterson

Source: Jazz Online. <http://www.jazzonln.com>

 **TEACHER NOTE “Shanghai”**

William Zinsser fills “Shanghai” with music. The Mitchell-Ruff Duo’s performance at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music includes the following music: the Negro spiritual “My Lord, What a Morning”; a ragtime selection; Jerome Kern’s “Yesterday”; a blues number; Billy Strayhorn’s “Lush Life.” While reflecting on the duo’s passion to honor their jazz heritage, Zinsser tells us that Ruff persuaded Yale University to hold a convocation to honor forty of America’s greatest black musical artists by naming them Duke Ellington Fellows. The honorees included Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, Odetta, Charles Mingus, Benny Carter, Slam Stewart, Bessie Jones, William Warfield, Marian Anderson, Roland Hayes, Paul Robeson, and Honi Coles. In the duo’s Shanghai performance the reader hears references to several classical composers who have influenced Mitchell and Ruff: Bach, Chopin, Debussy, and Ravel.

The teacher starts class with some selections from this list. Pairing a jazz number with a classical piece (the book mentions Debussy’s “Reverie” and Ravel’s “Pavane”) would be the best approach. The teacher need not be an expert or even a devoted amateur of either jazz or classical music to use this approach. The teacher can be a reader and a listener just as the students are, and take the approach, “This is what interested me about the music.” Students can offer their responses. As always, there will be knowledgeable students who can offer expertise and raise the level of the discussion.

Students respond through journal writing. The teacher chooses among the following prompts.

- ❑ What similarities can you hear between the two pieces of music?
- ❑ What moods can you detect in the music? What creates the moods?

Make a list of words that apply to the music played in class today. Can you describe the connections between the jazz and the classical music that Dwiki Mitchell and Willie Ruff present to the Shanghai Conservatory of Music?

 **STUDENT ACTIVITY “My Lord, What a Morning”**

For the following student activity, the teacher plays a recording of “My Lord, What a Morning.” Students can follow along with the handout of the song. After students have listened to the song several times, ask them to respond to the song and to the lecture Willie Ruff gave on the origins of jazz (pages 6-7) using the following handout in a cooperative group. After students work on the handout together, one person from each group can give the group’s perspective on one question. The teacher might want to enlarge the discussion by building on the answers to question number five: “Try to apply what you learned from listening to the spiritual and from Ruff’s lecture to the African-American art that you know.” What do students know about the art of their own ethnic heritage? Do they know how the art of their heritage and history connect? The connection between art and history is a motif in *Mitchell & Ruff*. Students will understand the concept better if they think about the idea in relationship to other art they know.

If students have studied the American Civil War, they might know Negro spirituals and their significance in American culture. The teacher can build on that knowledge.

➤ HANDOUT 1 Mitchell & Ruff

“My Lord, What a Morning”
(Anonymous African-American spiritual)

Refrain

My Lord, what a morning!
My Lord, what a morning!
O my Lord, what a morning!
When the stars begin to fall.

You'll hear a sinner mourn,
To wake the nations underground,
Looking to my God's right hand,
When the stars begin to fall.

Refrain

You'll hear a sinner pray,
To wake the nations underground,
Looking to my God's right hand,
When the stars begin to fall.

Refrain

You'll hear a Christian shout,
To wake the nations underground
Looking to my God's right hand,
When the stars begin to fall.

Refrain

You'll hear a Christian sing,
To wake the nations underground
Looking to my God's right hand
When the stars begin to fall

Refrain

Source: Cyber Hymnal. <http://www.cyberhymnal.org>

► HANDOUT 2 *Mitchell & Ruff*

Name _____

Date _____

The Origins of Jazz**► Directions:** In your cooperative group answer the following questions.

What are the qualities of the spiritual you just heard? Consider the musical elements: the instruments, rhythm, refrain, vocal quality, etc. Consider the words of the song. How can you relate the song to the history of African-American music?

Pick out the most evocative words of the song and list them. Try to agree on a label for the chosen words (poignant, reverent, humble, etc.) and be prepared to discuss them from that point of view.

In Willie Ruff's lecture on the origins of African-American music, what did you learn about the drum in African societies? What substitutes did American slaves find for the drum?

How did jazz performers adapt to Western instruments and music? What other connections exist between jazz and the music of other cultures?

Try to apply what you learned from listening to the spiritual and from Ruff's lecture to the African-American art that you know.

 **STUDENT ACTIVITY Jazz: The Words**

Jazz has provided a rich vocabulary to American—indeed, world—culture. Using the following handout, students can brainstorm on the meaning of words that come from jazz. They can also consider the idea of “special vocabularies” by listing words germane to an activity they know well, for example, skateboarding, surfing, ballet, football, etc. After students work on the handout individually, they can share their thoughts with a partner or in a cooperative group and expand their own list of jazz definitions.

In a whole group discussion the teacher can encourage the students to think about the creation, history, and roots of words. A dictionary could be consulted to match or augment the students’ definitions of the words associated with jazz. If the school library has the compact version of the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), it might be borrowed for the class period. Students can work in small groups with one volume of the OED while other students work with other dictionaries.

Students can be reminded that although Willie Ruff firmly believed in the language of music, he also believed in the power of actual words. His learning Chinese to perform in China as well as his using whatever language works best for any particular audience (conservatory students, kindergarteners, factory workers, or Italian church functionaries) shows his attempt to use all his resources to communicate with an audience.

► HANDOUT 3 *Mitchell & Ruff*

Name _____

Date _____

Special Languages

► Directions: Like many other arts and skills, jazz has developed its own language. Look through the following list of jazz-related words and try to define as many as you can. Aim for a minimum of five. If you can provide an example of how a word is used, add that to your definition. A few of the following words are explained in the “Shanghai” chapter of *Mitchell & Ruff*.

Jazz-related words: blues, hambone, boogie-woogie, improvisation, cool, honky-tonk, hipster, square, cats, nowhere, dig, ragtime, scat, soul, gig, jam.

Your Definitions

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Other Special Vocabularies

► Directions: List and define some of the words from another art or skill that you know. Some possibilities are skateboarding, football, ballet, computers, and photography.

Subject of vocabulary _____

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

 **TEACHER NOTE** Biography

Mitchell & Ruff is a biography of two contemporary musicians. Biography captures a large share of the publishing market. The Biography Channel and *People Magazine* are among the many media outlets that feature biography. What types of biographies do the students know? What have they read? Using the following questions (or similar questions), the teacher leads a discussion on the appeal of biography as well as the subjects, the audience, and the media outlets for biography. Answers can be listed on the board by several volunteers. At the end of the discussion, students would be “surrounded” by information on biography.

- ❑ What biographies have you read as school assignments?
- ❑ Do you have any favorites?
- ❑ Do you read biographies on your own? What kind?
- ❑ Are biographies popular reading with your parents or other family members?
- ❑ Can we list the many forms in which biographies are presented today? (The list can include the specific titles of periodicals, TV shows, Internet sites, etc.)
- ❑ What is the appeal of biography?
- ❑ How should a good writer set about the task of writing a biography?
- ❑ What kinds of information should be included in a biography?
- ❑ What are the difficulties in writing a biography?
- ❑ What is the difference between biography, autobiography, and memoir?

As a concluding activity, students work in pairs and interview each other in order to prepare brief biographies. The teacher reminds the students about the need to interest the audience and to provide appropriate information. If there is an uneven number of students, the teacher can participate. After preparing the brief biographies, students share them with the class. If the discussion of biography, the interviews, and the write-ups are all done within a class period, the biographies can be polished as a homework assignment and be shared at the beginning of the next class period.

 **TEACHER NOTE** **Shanghai Biography**

The stories of Dwiki Mitchell and Willie Ruff are the ongoing stories of this biography. In a discussion of the “Shanghai” chapter, the teacher asks the students what they learn about Mitchell and Ruff in this first chapter.

- ❑ How are the two men different from each other?
- ❑ What seems to be important to them?
- ❑ What is the significance of Ruff’s learning Chinese?
- ❑ How do they connect to the audience?
- ❑ What motivates them to go to China?

Another interesting story in “Shanghai” is that of Professor Tan Shu-chen. Students might know little about Communist China and the Cultural Revolution. (See Teacher Resource on “Modern China.”) After clarifying the historical background and perhaps even the geography with a classroom map, students can consider Professor Tan’s life experiences.

- ❑ How did World War II affect Professor Tan?
- ❑ What was the communist government’s view of the conservatory?
- ❑ What happened to Professor Tan during the Cultural Revolution?
- ❑ Why was he considered an enemy?
- ❑ How did he react to the changes caused by the revolution?
- ❑ How would you evaluate Professor Tan from this brief portrait?

As students learn more about Dwiki Mitchell and Willie Ruff, they might reconsider some of the other people presented in the book and see what connections they can draw between the two jazz artists and the other people presented.

TEACHER RESOURCE **Modern China**

1911	Revolution broke out in China against the imperial Qing Dynasty.
Pre-1949	Civil war erupted in China between Mao Zedong, leader of the communist forces, and Chiang Kai Shek, the nationalist leader. Eventually Mao Zedong defeated Chiang Kai Shek, who then set up an exile Chinese government in Taiwan.
October 1, 1949	Mao Zedong declared the People's Republic of China. The new government used forced-labor camps, prison, and "re-education" programs to isolate the "class enemies" of the new regime. Mao succeeded in unifying China.
1950–1953	Mao's version of communism spread to Korea. The United Nations intervened (Korean War). Mao supported North Korea, where communism was strongest. The U.N. supported South Korea, which resisted communism. The U.N. forces left without a victory, which strengthened Mao's position.
Pre-1965	Mao Zedong lost influence and became internationally isolated because of massive industrialization (Great Leap Forward) that proved to be a disaster. A split with the Soviet Union followed after Nikita Khrushchev criticized Mao.
1965	The Cultural Revolution was launched to strengthen Mao's position of leadership and to stifle dissenters in the party. The revolution used denunciations to punish "capitalists" and "counter-revolutionaries." The Red Guard, a semi-military organization, carried out the work of the revolution. The Gang of Four (Mao's wife—Jiang Qing—Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan, and Wong Hongwen) organized the Cultural Revolution. Although the revolution succeeded in re-establishing Mao's power, it did great harm to the stability and economy of China.
1985	Five years after Mao's death, the Chinese government denounced the Cultural Revolution.

 **TEACHER NOTE “Dunedin” and “Muscle Shoals”**

In writing the biography of Dwiki Mitchell and Willie Ruff, William Zinsser uses a dramatic mode of storytelling. *Mitchell & Ruff* has setting, characters, action, and dialogue.

Because he is writing about living people, William Zinsser can talk to his subjects, watch their performances, and record their conversations. He can note mannerisms, provide details about the weather, tell us what people are wearing. Mitchell and Ruff can speak directly to us. This method establishes an intimacy between the reader and the subjects.

Zinsser uses novelistic techniques as writers of New Journalism do. In *The New Journalism: An Anthology*, Tom Wolfe lists four techniques that “new journalists” use:

- ❑ Building the story using scene by scene construction with little narrative summary
- ❑ Reporting the dialogue along with the story
- ❑ Using a third person point of view that relies on reporting through a particular character’s eyes (i.e., the journalist becomes a character)
- ❑ Including the details of everyday life: mannerisms, clothes, images, etc.

James Boswell in his *Life of Samuel Johnson* (a work from the eighteenth century) also used direct reporting. Boswell became friends with Johnson, and he recounted the life of Johnson by giving everyday scenes, dialogue, physical description, etc.

Many biographies use a scholarly method in which events are summarized and analyzed. The biographer works from historical documents. He cannot hear conversations or record mannerisms except as he/she finds them in a reliable record. Such a work has a different tone, purpose, and audience.

 STUDENT ACTIVITY **Considering Biography**

Handouts 4, 5, and 6 contain excerpts from a range of biographies: “Demosthenes” from *Plutarch’s Lives*, James Boswell’s *Life of Johnson*, and David Herbert Donald’s *Lincoln*.

The teacher briefly introduces the three excerpts.

Plutarch’s Lives (circa 66 A.D.) contains forty-six biographies of Greeks and Romans of antiquity. The book pairs one life with another to suggest comparisons. For instance, Demosthenes (384–322 B.C.), a Greek, is paired with Cicero (106–43 B.C.), a Roman. Both men are famous orators. Demosthenes wrote the *Philippics*, which encouraged the Athenians to revolt against Philip II of Macedon. Marcus Tullius Cicero spoke for republican ideas in ancient Rome.

James Boswell’s *Life of Johnson* (first published in 1791) is considered one of the greatest biographies of all times. Boswell, long thought to be an idler who had the good fortune to imbibe Samuel Johnson’s greatness, is now recognized as a careful researcher and deft writer.

David Herbert Donald’s *Lincoln* (1995) is a respected scholarly biography with popular appeal. Donald, a Harvard professor, won Pulitzer Prizes for two earlier biographies.

Students should read the excerpts and then meet in cooperative groups to consider the style, purpose, and audience for one of the biographies. Students use Handout 7 to guide their discussion and to assemble notes to share with the class.

If the teacher decides that the excerpts chosen for this curriculum guide do not match the needs of the class, she or he can substitute other excerpts. Students might have read another biography recently, and that book could be compared with *Mitchell & Ruff* for style, purpose, and intended audience. Magazine biographies could be used, also.

The following biographies are suitable for younger readers and match the themes and content of the *Mitchell & Ruff* unit.

James Lincoln Collier. *Louis Armstrong: An American Success Story*. New York: Macmillan, 1985.

Jean Darby. *Martin Luther King, Jr.* Minneapolis: Lerner Publications, 1990.

Russell Freedman. *Lincoln: A Photobiography*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.

► HANDOUT 4 *Mitchell & Ruff***“Demosthenes” from *Plutarch’s Lives***

Demosthenes had recently delivered several speeches that the crowd received indifferently. From his youth, he had practiced and studied to be an orator, so he was very dejected when he met his friend Satyrus, an actor.

Another time when the assembly had refused to hear him, and he was going home with his head muffled up, taking it very heavily, they relate that Satyrus, the actor, followed him, and being his familiar acquaintance, entered into conversation with him. To whom, when Demosthenes bemoaned himself, that having been the most industrious of all the pleaders, and having almost spent the whole strength and vigor of his body in that employment, he could not yet find any acceptance with the people, that drunken sots, mariners, and illiterate fellows were heard, and had the hustings¹ for their own, while he himself was despised. “You say true, Demosthenes,” replies Satyrus, “but I will quickly remedy the cause of all this if you will repeat to me some passage out of Euripides or Sophocles.”² Which when Demosthenes had pronounced, Satyrus presently taking it up after him, gave the same passage, in his rendering of it, such a new form by accompanying it with proper mien³ and gesture, that to Demosthenes it seemed quite another thing. By thus being convinced how much grace and ornament language acquires from action, he began to esteem it a small matter, and as good as nothing for a man to exercise himself in declaiming it, if he neglected enunciation and delivery. Hereupon, he built himself a place to study in under ground (which was still remaining in our time) and hither he would come constantly to form his action, and to exercise his voice; and here he would continue, oftentimes without intermission, two or three months together, shaving one half of his head, that so for shame he might not go abroad, though he desired it ever so much.

¹ *hustings*: a place where political campaign speeches are made

² *Sophocles and Euripides*: famous Greek dramatists

³ *mien*: manner

► HANDBOUT 5 Mitchell & Ruff

“Boswell’s Introduction” from *Life of Johnson*

James Boswell had wanted to meet Samuel Johnson, who was an eminent man, but an introduction always eluded him. A poet, critic, and colorful personality, Johnson had published in 1775 a dictionary of the English language. He produced the dictionary completely on his own; it remains famous for its many colorful and opinionated definitions.

At last, on Monday, the 16th of May, when I was sitting in Mr. Davies’s back-parlour, after having drunk tea with him, Johnson unexpectedly came into his shop; and Mr. Davies having perceived him through the glass-door in the room in which we were sitting, advancing towards us,—he announced his awful approach to me, somewhat in the manner of Horatio, when he addresses Hamlet on the appearance of his father’s ghost, “Look, my lord, it comes.” I found that I had a perfect idea of Johnson’s figure, from the portrait of him painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds¹ soon after he had published his Dictionary, in the attitude of sitting in his easy chair in deep meditation; which was the first picture his friend did for him, which Sir Joshua kindly presented to me, and from which an engraving has been made for this work. Mr. Davies mentioned my name, and respectfully introduced me to him. I was much agitated; and recollecting his prejudice against the Scotch, of which I had heard much, I said to Davies, “Don’t tell where I come from.”—“From Scotland,” cried Davies roguishly. “Mr. Johnson,” said I, “I do indeed come from Scotland, but I cannot help it.” I am willing to flatter myself that I meant this as light pleasantry to soothe and conciliate him and not as a humiliating abasement at the expense of my country. But however that might be, this speech was somewhat unlucky; for with that quickness of wit for which he was so remarkable, he seized the expression “come from Scotland,” which I used in the sense of being of that country: and as if I had said that I had come away from it, or left it, retorted, “That, Sir, I find is what a very great many of your countrymen cannot help.” This stroke stunned me a good deal; and when we had sat down, I felt myself not a little embarrassed, and apprehensive of what might come next.

¹ *Sir Joshua Reynolds*: a famous portrait painter and a friend of Samuel Johnson

► HANDOUT 6 *Mitchell & Ruff***From Chapter Fourteen, “A Pumpkin in Each End of My Bag,”
in *Lincoln* by David Herbert Donald**

The Emancipation Proclamation stated that “on January 1, 1863, ‘all persons held as slaves’ within any state or part of a state still in rebellion would be ‘then, thenceforward, and forever free.’” (quoted from *Lincoln* by David Herbert Donald)

The initial Northern responses to the Emancipation Proclamation were predictable. Antislavery men were jubilant. “God bless Abraham Lincoln,” exclaimed Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune*. The President, announced Joseph Medill’s *Chicago Tribune*, had promulgated “the grandest proclamation ever issued by man.” In every major city throughout the North there were huge rallies to celebrate the proclamation, marked by bonfires, parades with torches and transparencies, and inevitably, fountains of oratory.

Scores of letters of commendation poured into the President’s office. “God bless you for the word you have spoken!” wrote three correspondents from Erie, Pennsylvania. “All good men upon the earth will glorify you, and all the angels in Heaven will hold jubilee.” “The virtuous, the reflecting, the intelligently patriotic . . . as one man hail your edict with delight,” the veteran Pennsylvania abolitionist J. M. McKim told the President, “and [they] bless and thank God that he put it in your heart to issue it.” A Baltimorean took an odd way of showing his enthusiasm for the proclamation by sending the President half a dozen hams.

Nearly every notable man of letters, especially those from New England, voiced approval of the proclamation. John Greenleaf Whittier, William Cullen Bryan, and James Russell Lowell all wrote eloquently in its praise. Hitherto cool toward Lincoln, Ralph Waldo Emerson was now prepared to forget “all that we thought shortcomings, every mistake, every delay,” because the president had “been permitted to do more for America than any other man.”

➤ HANDOUT 7 Mitchell & Ruff

Name _____

Date _____

Considering Biography

➤ **Directions:** You have read excerpts from famous biographies. Consider the biography assigned to your cooperative group. Answer the questions about the assigned biography. Include brief quotations that support your conclusions.

Describe the style of the biographer. Consider the kind of information included in the excerpt, the content of the quotations, the diction, sentence length, and the use of physical description.

What do you learn about the subject of the biography from this excerpt?

Why has the biographer written this book? (Some possibilities: to provide information, to inspire the reader, to give character guidance, to make the past come alive, to provide a context for important historical events.) Support your point of view about the biographer's purpose.

Note one or two details from this excerpt that interested your group. How do these details suit the apparent purpose of this work?

So far as you can judge from an excerpt, what aspects of this biography make it a successful work?

 **STUDENT ACTIVITY** **The Details in the Story**

The following handout on “Dunedin” and “Muscle Shoals” asks the students to look at the details that Zinsser provides to tell the story of Mitchell and Ruff. The handout serves as good preparation for a roundtable discussion of those two chapters since students will be prepared to offer examples and quotations from the text. It also calls attention to the creation of character in a nonfiction text. Students can use the handout for a homework assignment, prepare it in class, or find the answers with other students in a cooperative group.

➤ HANDOUT 8 *Mitchell & Ruff*

Name _____

Date _____

The Story in the Details

➤ **Directions:** Look for the incidents and details in “Dunedin” and “Muscle Shoals” that answer the questions. Summarize the details and note the page number/s where they occur.

What kind of places are Dunedin and Muscle Shoals? What was it like to be a young boy in those places?

What role did music play in Dwiki Mitchell’s and Willie Ruff’s early lives?

Explain how one person (not a parent) influenced each man.

What role did their churches play in their youth?

What kind of relationship did each man have with his parents?

What motivated each man to leave home and join the armed services?


 **TEACHER NOTE** “Columbus” and “Davenport”


In “Columbus” Zinsser writes about Lockbourne Air Force Base after World War II. The stories of Willie Ruff and Dwiki Mitchell coming to Lockbourne as young men passionate about music and leaving as young men with polished skills and direction present an America that existed before students were born. “Davenport,” on the other hand, tells about America today and about a typical road trip for the Mitchell-Ruff Duo.


If the teacher is playing music to begin classes on *Mitchell & Ruff*, these chapters provide wonderful suggestions. Ruff mentions the connection between Stravinsky and jazz, and he says that under the influence of Stravinsky’s music Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker “were starting to play weird.” Students might be surprised to know that Igor Stravinsky lived from 1882 to 1971, not exactly present day in the mind of young students, but perhaps they can be guided to see that other cultural phenomena, very close to their lives, date from the same period. Students might know the Disney film *Fantasia*. Available for rental now, a section of the film can be viewed in class. Perhaps, it could be compared with a film that uses jazz music to set tone or underscore action. For instance, the film *Metropolis* uses big band music. The Internet Movie Database (<http://www.imdb.com>) lists films by several categories including soundtracks. Go to the soundtrack link and type in “jazz” for the listings.

 **STUDENT ACTIVITIES** An American Story

Handout 9 uses quotations from “Columbus” and “Davenport.” The selected quotations allow students to review the events in the chapters, to see how Zinsser characterizes Mitchell and Ruff, and to understand the diversity that creates an American story. This handout can be used in the following ways:

 **Student Activity 1** For homework, assign one quotation to each student. There will probably be repeats. Ask students to find the quotation in the book and to note the page number. Then students should answer the following questions. What is the relevance of the quotation to the stories of Mitchell and Ruff? How does this quotation relate to the American experience treated in the chapter? When students come to class with their assignment, they engage in a roundtable discussion based on their homework.

 **Student Activity 2** For homework students review the quotations. They choose three quotations that interest them and write a brief comment on each in response to the question: How does this quotation relate to the American experience? Students then engage in a roundtable discussion based on their homework.

 **Student Activity 3** The teacher uses the handout as the basis of a roundtable discussion after students have considered assigned quotations in a cooperative group.

► HANDOUT 9 *Mitchell & Ruff*

Name _____

Date _____

“Columbus” and “Davenport”: The American Experience

The premise was that blacks couldn't learn to fly. (79)

“That base [Lockbourne] had the highest number of college degrees per capita of any military installation in the United States.” (81) [spoken by Ruff]

“That's what made Lockbourne a conservatory.” (82) [spoken by Ruff]

“Can you imagine a boy coming into the army from Dunedin with no musical education at all and somebody saying ‘Play this concerto’? It wasn't good, but I must have had guts to even try it.” (86) [spoken by Mitchell]

“Well, he played that first Rachmaninoff record and I began to cry. . . . The chords are so amazing—they go through incredible progressions, and they're very jazz-oriented. Of course it was the first classical piano I'd ever heard.” (87) [spoken by Mitchell]

“They looked like college professors. Many of them wouldn't talk English. They had learned French and German and Italian overseas, and as a mark of their elitism they spoke those languages among themselves and wouldn't deign to talk to younger soldiers. There were some that I never *did* hear speak English.” (91) [spoken by Ruff]

“I went to the movies every night,” he [Willie] says, “and heard those French horn players and the Philadelphia Orchestra. And all that Stravinsky! We had been listening to a lot of Stravinsky in the dayroom back in Wyoming because Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker and the other beboppers all wanted to sound like Stravinsky and were starting to play weird.” (95)

“. . . an attempt to find a professional career as French-horn player in a symphony orchestra. That just wasn't a possibility for blacks. As a young Jew he [Abe Kniaz] was tremendously pre-occupied with the plight of the underdog, and every Saturday he went to great lengths to tell me what I was up against and to prepare me to make peace within myself.” (99) [spoken by Ruff]

“The impression that he [Mr. Brice] was always trying to make on youngsters was that we must never be trapped by the usual excuses that society uses to exclude blacks: that they can't read music; that they don't have the right symphonic tone; that they can't arrive on time; that they're careless about detail.” (100) [spoken by Ruff]

Now I [Zinsser] begin to realize how much of America's educational landscape they have touched. (104)

Ruff asks the kids if they can say “improvisation.” They can. “To improvise,” he says, “means to have fun with something—to change it around and make it different.” (110)

“You should know that nobody else in the world invented jazz but Americans. It’s truly American music.” (111) [spoken by Ruff]

Mitchell and Ruff both emphasize their formal training. Mitchell says it’s very important to him that his jazz is grounded in classical disciplines. “Can you teach someone to improvise?” the interviewer wants to know. “What I can teach is form and structure,” Mitchell says. “When you teach improvisation, your students somehow wind up sounding like you—and that’s not good.” (112–113)

We are at the absolute center of the American male experience; no bright shirts or gaudy ties violate its centrality. (113)

“They [people in the Quad City community] could see a direct connection between art and life. . . . Now they see that artists are men and women who relate to them in a number of ways, and they’ve been stretched. They’re much more adventurous and curious and open.” (117) [spoken by Mrs. Jecklin]

“You can’t do anything without technique—that’s what opens you up.” (121) [spoken by Mitchell]

I’m [Zinsser] struck, as I have been in other corners of America, by the difference that one man and one company can make in the quality of life. (124)

One girl asks Ruff how many languages he can speak. “As many as I want to eat in,” he replies. (129)

The solicitude of black trainmen for black people traveling on the trains was a gift that Ruff still talks about warmly. (132)

As we cross the railroad tracks at the edge of town I see a huge grain elevator. We are in the heartland! American is not one big taco hut after all. (135)

“When I [Mitchell] perform I’m transformed into something else. Once you start to touch on yourself you touch other people. But it has to have fire. It has to have meaning. It has to have living—all the things that I’ve gone through and that I’m sure everyone else has.” (137)

“Mitchell and Ruff know who they are from the moment they walk on the stage. They’re not going to make an effort to ingratiate themselves. Young people are sensitive to that kind of insincerity—they’ve had a lot of it on TV, and they’ve had enough. These kids are impressed by anyone who doesn’t have to prove himself. I felt that with Mitchell and Ruff we were in the presence of men who have reached for the stars, and I’d guess some of the depths. I’m not surprised that they appealed to the Chinese. Their appeal is universal.” (139) [spoken by Mary Foster]


 **TEACHER NOTE** **People and Places of America**


Part of the interest in *Mitchell & Ruff* lies in the many portraits of places and people. Students can apply the concept and the methods of this book to their own lives by considering the people and places important to them. The teacher can use an interview or a neighborhood project separately as a unit assignment, or the teacher can weave together several assignments into a larger work that might be called "My American Profile."


 **STUDENT ACTIVITIES** **The Interview**

Students should choose people they encounter in their daily lives for this assignment. Again, depending on the teacher's goal, students could do one interview or several.

Handout 10 provides hints and methods for conducting an interview. The interview assignment can be used in several ways:


 **Student Activity 1** The interview can be a project in itself with students “writing up” the questions and answers.


 **Student Activity 2** The interview can be woven into a “feature” story that includes the setting, the appearance of the subject, and other details gleaned through research. For instance, the student might interview the family dentist and include the look of the office, the dentist's appearance and behavior, and information about dentistry.

 **Student Activity 3** The interview can be research for the “My American Profile” project.

 **STUDENT ACTIVITIES** **Neighborhoods**

William Zinsser organizes *Mitchell & Ruff* around the places where Dwiki Mitchell and Willie Ruff live and perform. The mingling of people, place, and action makes the biography lively. Students already have powerful feelings and associations built around places. The following assignments provide an opportunity for students to build on those feelings and associations.

 **Student Activity 1: A Neighborhood Map** Students draw maps of their neighborhoods. The teacher helps students develop a working definition of neighborhood for this project. Students who live in apartment buildings might want to cover the whole neighborhood or just parts of the building and grounds. Students who recently moved might want to use their former neighborhood for the project. If students live near the school, perhaps they can work in neighborhood groups.

 **Student Activity 2: Writing About a Place** Handout 11 suggests how to get good information about a place and how to use it. Again, this could be a separate assignment or part of a larger one.

► HANDOUT 10 Mitchell & Ruff

Name _____

Date _____

The Interview

All people are interesting. A good interviewer can discover the interesting parts of anyone's life, but those new to conducting an interview should pick someone with an obvious area of interest. Consider someone with an interesting hobby or occupation, a personal history that is different from others in the community, or a passion for the arts.

Have paper and several pencils or pens. You don't want to arrive without writing materials or have your one pencil break during the interview. A tape recorder is probably not helpful since it makes you a less active listener. Also, if you must rely on your notes, you will do a better job and be further along in your project.

Chat with the person a little before taking out your pencil and paper.

Make a list of questions in advance. It is good to have many since the person interviewed might not respond to the obvious questions as you might like. Also, do not be trapped by your own questions. If the person talks about a subject you didn't anticipate and the subject is interesting, take notes.

If you are taking notes and find you cannot keep up with the subject, ask him or her politely for a minute so that you can catch up with your notes. You can also politely ask the subject to repeat statements. Make notes using some of the shorthand techniques you have acquired taking notes in school.

Right after the interview, write out your notes in a legible form or enter them into a word processor. Do this right away while your notes make sense to you.

After you have written out the interview, look for the quotations and themes that made the interview interesting. If you remember something that you do not have good notes for, call the subject and ask him or her about it. You will look conscientious, not incompetent.

In writing up the interview, use your good quotations. Be sure to quote the subject accurately. If you don't have every word that is all right, but never distort what the subject said.

In writing up the interview, it is all right to use "he said" or "she said" to make clear what is happening in the conversation. Don't try to be fancy and substitute expressions (he smiled, she gushed, he stressed, etc.). This is not a place to introduce variety into your writing.

(Suggestions for interviewing taken from "The Interview" in William Zinsser's *On Writing Well*.)

► HANDOUT 11 Mitchell & Ruff

Name _____

Date _____

My Neighborhood

Use good details in writing about your neighborhood. Think about your neighborhood as if you were a tourist and trying to discover the interest in the area so that you can tell someone else about it.

Use images in writing about your neighborhood. Don't say that an area is "beautiful," "ugly," "unusual," or "pleasant." Walk around with a notebook and write down what you see, hear, smell, feel (as in the sense of touch), and taste. Consider the texture of the benches in a park, the surface of a basketball court, the grass around the community swimming pool. Consider the smell of cooking, the aroma of the trash truck, the diesel fumes of trucks and school buses. Consider the "wake-up" sounds on your street, the different noises that make up a playground, evening traffic, the voices from windows and back yards. Consider your neighborhood in different lights (morning, evening) and in different weathers. Rain has a smell, and wet things look different from dry things. Evening light makes buildings and people look different. Sometimes you can "taste" strong smells, which can be bad or good. Capture all these details in your notes.

Don't forget people. People are part of the landscape. For this assignment, you don't want to focus on one person, but you want to include the details of the people as they fit into the landscape you are describing. Think about the kids at the playground, people going to work, children playing on the sidewalk, the men and women who work in your neighborhood. Again, use images.

When you have your details, see what you have. It is always a good idea to write down notes "taken on the run" in a legible form, either by hand or word processor. Just re-writing your notes helps you think about the material. As you consider what you have, look for a dominant impression. What quality about your neighborhood would allow you to communicate a sense of it to a reader? Maybe you want to focus on a time of day. For instance, a controlling statement might be "My neighborhood hums in the morning." Then the writer would use the details that show the energy of the neighborhood in the morning. Maybe the writer wants to focus on one place in the neighborhood, "Everyone in my neighborhood goes to the corner park." Then the writer will describe the park and what various things attract all these people. The writer will describe the people within this setting and as part of it.

(Suggestions for writing about a place taken from "Writing About a Place" in William Zinsser's *On Writing Well*.)

 **TEACHER NOTE** “New York” and “Venice”

The final two chapters of *Mitchell & Ruff* revisit many of the themes and motifs of the book. Again music—classical and popular, old and new—holds the story elements together.

We hear Dwiki Mitchell playing in his New York apartment and learn that he uses both Harold Arlen and Chopin to sharpen his skills. After leaving the army, he studied piano with Agi Jambor at the Philadelphia Musical Academy (now part of the University of the Arts). He heard her playing Bach with the Philadelphia Orchestra. “She was playing Bach, but she made me think of Negro spirituals.”

Willie Ruff wanted to play his French horn in Saint Mark’s Cathedral in Venice because he believed that the Venetian music of the 1500s and 1600s connects to the music invented by African-Americans. Ruff brought his *Liber Usualis* to Venice intending to play sacred music. He played “Pange Lingua” at Stravinsky’s grave and finally had the chance to perform ancient music and Negro spirituals at Saint Mark’s for an audience of three. The scene in Saint Mark’s Cathedral is so compelling that the teacher might want to take class time to read the scene aloud (pages 186–191).

The teacher can use some of these musical connections to prepare students for class discussion. If the teacher plays some of the pairs—for instance, Bach and Negro spirituals, students can do a short journal response listing all the ideas that the pairing suggests.

 **STUDENT ACTIVITY** Themes and Motifs in *Mitchell & Ruff*

Students make a list of the important ideas (themes, motifs) that occur in “New York” and “Venice.” Remind students that these important ideas have been developed throughout the book. The music can be a prompt for this activity.

Students then share their lists with a partner. The partner pair comes up with the definitive list they will share with the class. Students should aim for a list of eight to ten items.

When the pairs finish working, the class assembles all the ideas generated either on the chalkboard or newsprint or some other form so that all the class can see it. PowerPoint screens can also be used.

Students might generate a list that includes jazz, music, mix of cultures, determination to succeed, connection among different arts, geography, dedication to art, small minds vs. big minds, emotional content of art, technical competence required by art, past and present, teachers and students, classical and popular, European and American, learning and living styles.

The teacher can guide students in making larger categories within which other subjects fall. A good method for doing this quickly is to use colored chalk. If students note that several subjects could be put into one category marked music, the teacher can box all those secondary subjects with blue chalk and then encircle another category of subjects with red circles and so on.

In cooperative groups students then work on one category of subjects. They look for passages, quotations, scenes, etc. from “New York” and “Venice” that relate to the category. Each group makes up five either questions or prompts for a whole class discussion. The group that makes up the questions should lead that part of the discussion and be able to provide the resource of the page numbers, quotations, etc. that would help the other students.

 **TEACHER NOTE** **Bringing It Together**

This section includes Handout 12, “The Final Note” and Handout 13, a unit test. Teachers should also look at the final projects included in the curriculum guide: “The Jazz Age,” “Jazz Quest,” “Jazz Poetry,” and “My American Profile” when planning class activities that provide a consideration of the entire reading experience.

 **STUDENT ACTIVITY** **The Final Note**

The teacher can use Handout 12 for a roundtable discussion. If students have the handout in advance, they can prepare responses to all the questions or to one assigned question. The handout could also be used in cooperative groups with each group taking a few questions.

The first question on Handout 12 asks students to find the “performance scenes” from the first and last chapters of the biography. For the teacher’s convenience they are listed here: “Shanghai” pages 4–7, 19–27; “Venice” pages 186–191. The scene at Stravinsky’s grave is on pages 179–180.

 **STUDENT ACTIVITY** **Unit Test**

Handout 13 is a unit essay test provided for the teacher's convenience. It has no directions on it so that the teacher can formulate it to suit his/her class. The teacher might direct students to only answer one question and to use both *Mitchell & Ruff* and the students' notes in answering the question. If a final project or writing assignment could substitute for a test, that would be a better assessment solution.

► HANDOUT 12 *Mitchell & Ruff*

Name _____

Date _____

The Final Note: *Mitchell & Ruff*

The first and last chapters of *Mitchell & Ruff* use “performance scenes” that help us understand the characters of Dwiki Mitchell and Willie Ruff as well as their beliefs and the influences on their lives. Re-read these scenes and comment on them as they reveal important themes in *Mitchell & Ruff*.

Improvisation is an important concept in this biography. What does it mean in jazz? How can the word be applied to the stories of Dwiki Mitchell and Willie Ruff? To any life?

Both Dwiki Mitchell and Willie Ruff are African-American jazz musicians. How has being African-American affected their lives?

William Zinsser obviously respects and admires the dedication to art exhibited by Dwiki Mitchell and Willie Ruff. What details does he provide in the biography to show that dedication? Consider their youths, their training in music, their current positions, and their performances.

Mitchell and Ruff are equally dedicated to music. How do they differ, though, as artists and people? What details from the book show these differences?

Mitchell & Ruff begins and ends in foreign countries. Why are the events in these countries important to the themes of the book?

What are the themes of *Mitchell & Ruff*? How are the themes presented?

In his foreword to *Mitchell & Ruff*, Albert Murray says, “To my delight, this book is remarkably free of social science findings and studies and speculations about race relations. Its fundamental concern is with the development of an American esthetic sensibility.” What does he mean by this statement? Do you agree with it?

Near the end of the foreword, Murray says, “these two men forged their American identity as artists.” What does he mean by this statement? Do you agree with it? What meaning does the term “American identity” have?

What did you learn about art from reading *Mitchell & Ruff*?

What did you learn about life?

► HANDOUT 13 *Mitchell & Ruff*

Name _____

Date _____

Unit Test

1. *Mitchell & Ruff* is subtitled *An American Profile in Jazz*. In what sense does the book present an American profile? Consider the elements of American society that influenced these men and the result of that influence.
2. At the end of the concert at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, Professor Tan shook Dwiki Mitchell's hand and said, "You are an artist." Why is that statement such a compliment for Mitchell? What does the term artist come to mean in the story of *Mitchell & Ruff*?
3. Many people and institutions played a role in raising and educating Dwiki Mitchell and Willie Ruff. Write about either Mitchell or Ruff and the various influences on his life.
4. Dwiki Mitchell tells a young musician, "You can't do anything without technique—that's what opens you up." Later he tells the boy, "I feel that you're too safe." What are the elements in developing competence that Mitchell's quotes suggest? How does the book develop these ideas?
5. The book is organized around various places where Dwiki Mitchell and Willie Ruff live and perform. Choose a few of these places and show how the duo connects to the audiences there. What does their ability to connect say about these performers and their view of music?

 **TEACHER NOTE** **My American Profile**

Because *Mitchell & Ruff* tells an American story, students could use the book as a model for writing their own American story. If students conducted interviews and wrote about neighborhood places, those activities could connect to this larger project. The teacher could adapt one of the suggestions listed here or devise a related project more suited to student need and curriculum requirements. Aspects of the project could be visual (for example, art work, cultural artifacts of a family, or video footage) or aural (for example, recorded music or original student performance). Students could present their work to the school community or a larger community. An assembly program, a school display, or a web site would provide venues for presentation.

 **STUDENT ACTIVITY** **My American Profile**

In *Mitchell & Ruff*, William Zinsser organizes his book around places associated with Dwiki Mitchell and Willie Ruff. Students can organize their profiles around places also. They need not include foreign countries, but for some students, a different country of origin fits the concept of “My American Profile.” Places can be thought of broadly or narrowly depending on the students. The home, the school, and the sports field could be three places in a student’s life that would provide structure for telling his or her story. Three different classrooms within the school could also provide the places for the story. Handout 14 provides guidance to students for beginning this project.

➤ **HANDOUT 14** *Mitchell & Ruff*

Name _____

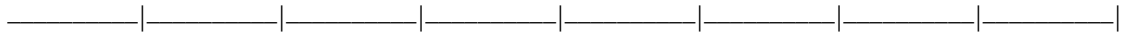
Date _____

My American Profile

➤ **Directions:** Like William Zinsser you are going to write a story organized around different places. Your story, however, will be autobiographical, rather than biographical. This handout will get you started.

1. Fill in the following timeline with important events from your life. They need not be unique events to be important. Write the event on the line and then use the space above and below the line to write details about the event.

Timeline for _____



2. Select three events for focus. Think about a place that you can connect with each event. An event might be living in a different city or even a different home. If music, art, or sports are important in your life, use a place most connected with that activity for one of the three.

Event

Place

3. The next step depends on the events and places you want to write about. Think about which of the following suits your project and then decide on the next step. Visit places and gather details (take notes, make a video record, use a tape recorder). Study photos or family videos. Interview people in your family or neighborhood. Send an email “interview” to people who could give you information.

Next Step _____

 **STUDENT ACTIVITY** **The Jazz Age**

Students who have studied the 1920s in American history and/or have read *The Great Gatsby* can think about their own age from the perspective of an artistic label. Using Handout 15, “The Jazz Age,” as a guide, students brainstorm on the present time and see what characteristics apply. Students can make up their own categories once they have begun assembling information. For example, they might include music, art, film, fashions, current events, and cultural phenomena. Brainstorming is amplified and confirmed through research. Students then label contemporary culture either by using a musical term or one from another art form. If students work in cooperative groups, each group can then present the findings to the class.

➤ HANDOUT 15 *Mitchell & Ruff*

The Jazz Age, 1918 to 1929

History

World War I had just ended. At first Americans felt jubilant over victory, but returning soldiers told of trench warfare, poison gas, and huge losses. Although World War I was widely proclaimed as “the war to end all wars,” world events (rise of dictators in Europe, Russian Revolution) quickly convinced many Americans that the war had changed little for the good.

In 1919 the Volstead Act, which prohibited the sale of alcoholic beverages, was passed. The Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution established prohibition as the law of the land. Prohibition grew from lofty ideals to save and reform mankind, but people flouted the law. Gangsters controlled the illegal liquor trade, and speakeasies flourished. The Twenty-First Amendment (1933) abolished prohibition.

The Nineteenth Amendment, which gave women the right to vote, passed in 1920. Women had learned to organize during the push for prohibition.

Society

Until the Stock Market Crash of 1929, which marked the end of the Jazz Age, American society seemed very prosperous. New technology, such as refrigerators, gas ranges, automobiles, player pianos, and the phonograph made life easier and livelier. The stock market no longer remained the reserve of the rich as average Americans began purchasing stock. The market rose to numbers not supported by productivity or real wealth. Insider trading, wild speculation, a farm depression, and a shaky overseas market finally ended the great bull market.

The flapper, with her beaded dresses and flashing legs, became an icon of the Jazz Age. Women with short hair (the bob began the trend), short skirts, and make-up defied standards of decorum.

Entertainment

Jazz, the music of energy and improvisation, became synonymous with the times. Jelly Roll Morton, Louis Armstrong, Bix Beiderbecke, Bessie Smith, and Duke Ellington were among the jazz musicians who found a large audience during this time.

Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich were America’s most popular female movies stars. Each had an exotic, yet worldly quality. Rudolph Valentino was a well-known romantic lead, most known for his role in *The Sheik*.

Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton were among the great comedians of the 1920s.

Films moved from the silent era to the “talkies.”

At the beginning of the 1920s, few Americans had access to radios. By the mid-twenties, 50 million Americans owned radios, and they listened to news, music, drama, comedy, do-it-yourself programs, and religious revivals.

Writers

The Harlem Renaissance demonstrated the unique quality of African-American culture. Fueled by the migration of African-Americans from the rural South to the industrial North and by the rise of intellectuals like W.E.B. Du Bois (one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), this movement was artistic, cultural, and scholarly. Some of the great writers from the Harlem Renaissance include Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, and Zora Neale Hurston.

Other important writers from this time include F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Edmund Wilson, John Dos Passos, Ring Lardner, John O’Hara, Dorothy Parker, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Robert Benchley, H.L. Mencken, Malcolm Cowley, Ezra Pound, and Sinclair Lewis.

Slang

all wet—wrong; baloney—nonsense; big cheese—important person; beef—a complaint; cat’s meow—something good; copacetic—excellent; doll—an attractive woman; doublecross—to cheat; get-up—an outfit; high hat—a snob; icy mitt—rejection; java—coffee; killjoy—solemn person; line—a false story; nifty—good; putting on the Ritz—acting in high style (from the Ritz Hotel in Paris); sap—a fool; scratch—money; skirt—an attractive female; speakeasy—a place serving illegal liquor; swanky—stylish; teenager—young adult; vamp—a flirty woman

Automobiles

Model T Runabout, Pierce-Arrow, Cadillac, Stutz Bearcat.

Notable Events

Charles Lindbergh flew solo across the Atlantic in 1927.

During the Scopes Monkey Trial (1925), Clarence Darrow defended John Thomas Scopes for teaching evolution, which was against the law in Tennessee. William Cullens Bryant argued for the state.

 **STUDENT ACTIVITY** **The Jazz Quest**

Using Handout 16, students do a web search to learn more about jazz. Before accessing Internet sites, the teacher guides the students in listing questions and then narrowing the focus to one important question. Depending on the time allotted, students could pose questions that will lead to a major investigation or pose questions that will allow data to be compiled for a class sharing or a class discussion. There are many possibilities in between these two approaches, and the web quest might be a first step in a research project that could expand to include periodicals, books, films, and interviews.

The web quest provides a good opportunity to review computer etiquette, the guidelines for research that have been established at the school, and tips for distinguishing a credible Internet site from one whose value is unknown.

Most web sites associated with jazz have a commercial aspect, but all the sites listed on the handout include the history of jazz and biographies of jazz musicians.

► HANDOUT 16 *Mitchell & Ruff***The Jazz Quest**

Mitchell & Ruff presents Dwiki Mitchell and Willie Ruff, two African-American musicians who want to play their music and teach others about it. The web quest is an opportunity to learn more about jazz. Start with a question to guide your quest.

Question _____

WNUR 89.3 FM, Northwestern University's radio station

<http://www.wnur.org/jazz>

PBS: Related to Ken Burns' Film on Jazz

<http://www.pbs.org/jazz>

PBS: Site for Young Students

<http://www.pbs.org/jazz/kids>

Smithsonian Institute: America's Jazz Heritage

<http://www.si.edu/ajazzh>

British Broadcasting Company

<http://bbc.co.uk/aboutmusic>

The following sites are privately maintained:

Site includes history of jazz.

<http://www.jass.com>

Site includes current music, history of jazz, and biographies.

<http://apassion4jazz.net>

Site focuses on jazz from 1895 to 1929.

<http://redhotjazz.com>

Site includes musical technique and history of jazz.

<http://www.thejazzguide.com>

► **HANDOUT 17** *Mitchell & Ruff*

Jazz Poetry

Jazz poetry can mean different things to different people. To Kenneth Rexroth, an American poet, it meant “the reciting of suitable poetry with the music of a jazz band, usually small and comparatively quiet. Most emphatically, it is not recitation with ‘background’ music. The voice is integrally wedded to the music and, although it does not sing notes, is treated as another instrument, with its own solos and ensemble passages, and with solo and ensemble work by the band alone.”

So jazz poetry can be a poem that blends with the music of a jazz group and uses the elements of jazz music. Some beat poetry fits this definition. All beat poetry, moreover, was influenced by jazz.

Jazz poetry can also be poetry that attempts to mimic the improvisational quality and sound of jazz like Carl Sandburg’s “Jazz Fantasia.”

Jazz Fantasia

by Carl Sandburg

Drum on your drums, batter on your banjos, sob on the long cool winding saxophones.
Go to it, O jazzmen.

Sling your knuckles on the bottoms of the happy tin pans, let your trombones ooze, and
go husha-husha-hush with the slippery sandpaper.

Moan like an autumn wind high in the lonesome treetops, moan soft like you wanted
somebody terrible, cry like a racing car slipping away from a motorcycle cop,
bang-bang! you jazzmen, bang altogether drums, traps, banjos, horns, tin
cans—make two people fight on the top of a stairway and scratch each other’s
eyes in a clinch tumbling down the stairs.

Can the rough stuff . . . now a Mississippi steamboat pushes up the night river with a
hoo-hoo-hoo-oo . . . and the green lanterns calling to the high soft stars . . . and
a red moon rides on the humps of the low river hills . . . go to it, O jazzmen.

From *Smoke and Steel* (1920)

In the following poem Yusef Komunyakaa, like Carl Sandburg, uses jazz themes, diction, and rhythms. Komunyakaa wrote this poem as a tribute to Thelonious Monk, a pianist and composer. Monk is known as the “high priest of bebop”; he frequently performed at Minton’s.

Elegy for Thelonious

by Yusef Komunyakaa

Damn the snow.
Its senseless beauty
pours a hard light
through the hemlock.
Thelonious is dead. Winter
drifts in the hourglass;
notes pour from the brain cup.
Damn the alley cat
wailing a muted dirge
off Lenox Ave.
Thelonious is dead.
Tonight’s a lazy rhapsody of shadows
swaying to blue vertigo
metaphysical funk.
Black trees in the wind.
Crepuscule with Nellie
plays inside the bowed head.
Dig the Man Ray of piano!
O Satisfaction,
hot fingers blur on those white rib keys.
Coming on the Hudson.
Monk’s Dream.
The ghost of bebop
from 52nd Street,
footprints in the snow
Damn February.
Let’s go to Minton’s
play modern malice
till daybreak. Lord,
there’s Thelonious
wearing that old funky hat
pulled down over his eyes.

From *Copacetic* (1984)

Writing Jazz Poetry

► **Subject** You need a subject. Keep in mind that poetry communicates the experience of the poet, not a message about life. If a “message” emerges from the experience, the poem will let it exist subtly.

List a few experiences you can write about. Have you ever been moved by art the way Carl Sandburg was in “Jazz Fantasia”? Have you ever mourned a musical artist whose work meant something important to you? Have you ever felt that some piece of music or art captured an experience from your life?

Jazz frequently captures strongly felt moments. Can you list moments like that from your life? Think back over the music you have heard while reading Mitchell & Ruff. Does any of it bring a theme or an experience to your mind?

► **Details** When you have a subject, list details from the experience you associate with that subject. Images (what is seen, heard, felt, tasted, etc.) are best. In Komunyakaa’s poem the speaker is walking on a New York street, and he is thinking of Thelonious Monk because he has just died. The walk gives the poet several levels of experience to use. He hears the cat, feels the snow, sees footprints, etc. He also has the level of remembrance, which allows him to include details about Monk.

► **Diction** Diction means the words a poet uses. Good images provide good diction. Look also for the words that “belong” to your subject. If you are writing about music, use words from that kind of music. If you are writing about a place, use words that fit that place or are distinctively from that place.

► **Sound and Rhythm** In drafting your poem, try to use the arrangement of words on the line and the grouping of lines for rhythmic effect. Note how Carl Sandburg uses very long lines to suggest the riffs and improvisation in jazz. Try to group words whose sound goes together well. If your experience is harsh, use harsh-sounding words. If the experience is dreamy, look for dreamy words. In other words, some words sound softer than others, and in English there are many word choices.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment involves checking the students' understanding and progress so that the teacher can guide the students as individuals in reaching the objectives of the unit. Assessment should also focus on the curriculum itself. The teacher can evaluate which activities help students and which concepts and skills require more instruction.

The teacher needs to keep students on task, and assessment helps the teacher to do so. Finally, the teacher needs an objective evaluation of students' progress so that grades can be published that reflect both student learning and involvement. Ideally, the assessment tools match the objectives of the unit.

Daily Assessment

To translate the activities in this unit into a grade, consider the following:

Cooperative learning activities can be evaluated. When roles are assigned to students in a cooperative group, one student can be in charge of the checklist for the teacher. He or she can note the group's approach to the components of the assignment and the group's success in completing the components. A standard checklist can be used for all cooperative group activities or the student can write one up for each activity. This need not take long for either the student or the teacher. The teacher can have a point value assigned to the activity and return the checklist to the group with a notation—8/10, for instance. This method allows the teacher to consider both the students' behaviors and the work they produce. Students become accustomed to this method very quickly, and the almost-instant feedback reinforces the class standards.

Handouts and activities can be used for homework assignments. A "1 to 10" scale can be used to evaluate accuracy, thoroughness, etc.

If *Mitchell & Ruff* is assigned by chapters for homework reading, a "reading quiz" can be used. A reading quiz evaluates how students did the reading rather than their retention of specific facts. The following can be used as prompts for a reading quiz:

- ❑ Write down three facts from the chapter on "Muscle Shoals" that you consider important.
- ❑ Write down the major understanding you gleaned from reading the chapter on "Muscle Shoals."
- ❑ Write down a discussion question that relates to the chapter on "Muscle Shoals."

- ❑ Write down three questions that you have after reading the chapter on “Muscle Shoals.”

If students own their copies of the book, and the teacher has encouraged students to mark their texts as they read, their notations can be the basis of a quiz. See “Socratic Seminars” in *Teaching in the Block* (Robert Lynn Canady and Michael D. Rettig, editors. Princeton: Eye on Education, 1996) for guidance in making notations in texts.

Unit Assessment

The curriculum guide includes several final projects. All could involve both a written component and a presentation. Projects could be shared with a larger community through a web site or a school display. In judging all the components of a final project, the teacher and students can create standards based on the objectives of the assignment. For presentations the standards might include quality of the information, effective use (organization and coherence) of the information, display of materials, attention to audience, phrasing, and clarity of voice.

Mitchell & Ruff provides both a model and inspiration for many other final projects. These might take the form of traditional research papers, “I Search” papers, class presentations, class-created web sites, or school and community exhibits. Some suggestions follow:

- ❑ What is the connection between music and culture?
- ❑ What is the connection between one musical artist and his/her time?
- ❑ How do the various components of an art develop?
- ❑ What does geography have to do with biography?
- ❑ What effect do new media have on music?
- ❑ What effect do new media have on culture?
- ❑ What are the roots of the music or art which interests a student?
- ❑ What is another all-American phenomenon?

The unit test, which could be used in place of a final project or in conjunction with a final project, continues the emphasis on the American profile that William Zinsser creates in *Mitchell & Ruff* as well as on the concept of the artist.

LIST OF WORKS CONSULTED

Books

- America: An Illustrated Diary of Its Most Exciting Years. Book 1, Writers and Writing.* Valencia: American Family Enterprise Press, 1973.
- Andrist, Ralph K., Edmund Sullivan, Marshall Davidson, and Nancy Kelly. *The American Heritage History of the 20's & 30's.* New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., 1970.
- Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. *Curriculum Update.* Winter, 2001.
- Ball, Wanda H., and Pam F. Brewer. "Socratic Seminars." In *Teaching in the Block*, edited by Robert Lynn Canady and Michael D. Rettig. Princeton: Eye on Education, 1996.
- Boswell, James. *Life of Johnson.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.
- Donald, David Herbert. *Lincoln.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995.
- Komunyakaa, Yusef. "Elegy for Thelonius." In *Copacetic.* Scranton: Wesleyan University Press, 1984.
- National Council of Teachers of English and International Reading Association. *Standards for the English Language Arts.* 1996.
- Plutarch. *Plutarch's Lives.* Edited by Arthur Hugh Clough and translated by John Dryden. New York: Collier and Son, 1909.
- Rexroth, Kenneth. "Jazz Poetry." In *World Outside the Window: The Selected Essays of Kenneth Rexroth*, edited by Bradford Morrow. New Directions, 1987. Reprinted on <http://www.oracularlab.com>.
- Sandburg, Carl. "Jazz Fantasia." In *Modern American Poetry*, edited by Louis Untermeyer. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1950.
- Wolfe, Tom. *The New Journalism: An Anthology.* New York: Harper and Row, 1973.
- Zinsser, William. *On Writing Well*, 2nd ed. New York: Harper and Row, 1980.
- . *Writing to Learn.* New York: HarperCollins, 1989.

Internet Sites

Bassocantante. <http://www.bassocantante.com/flapper>.

British Broadcasting Company. <http://www.news.bbc.co.uk>.

Christian Science Monitor. <http://www.csmonitor.com>.

Cyber Hymnal. <http://www.cyberhymnal.com>.

Internet Movie Database. <http://www.imdb.com>.

Jazz Online. <http://www.jazzonln.com>.

Jazz Age Page. <http://www.btinternet.com/~dreklind/jazzhome>.

Jazz Slang Page. <http://home.earthlink.net/~dlarkins/slang-pg.htm>.

Literary Kicks. <http://www.litkicks.com>.

Michigan State University. <http://www.msu.edu>.

National Council of Social Studies. <http://www.socialstudies.org>.

Perspectives in American Literature. <http://www.csutan.edu>.

Red Hot Jazz Archive. <http://www.redhotjazz.com>.

Washington State University. <http://www.wsu.edu>.