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# Activity Guide

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## John Coltrane's Giant Steps

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### ABOUT THE STORY

In this book about jazz giant John Coltrane, Chris Raschka celebrates the saxophonist's ingenuity by taking readers on an exploration of the sounds that make up his musical style.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR

Chris Raschka loves jazz and has written about jazz greats Thelonious Monk (Mysterious Thelonious) and Charlie Parker (Charlie Parker Played Be Bop). Both books are also Live Oak Music Makers. Raschka lives in New York City with his wife and son. As well as jazz, he enjoys playing the viola, walking, and surfing.

### INTRODUCING THE STORY

Ask children if they have ever listened to jazz music. Explain that jazz often takes a melody, sometimes a familiar melody, and adds to it and changes it in different ways. Tell them that the book they will read is about a jazz musician, and they will hear one of his jazz compositions.

### READING ACTIVITIES

#### **Comprehension/Thinking Skills**

- "What does the writer mean by a "box, our base, the sound foundation"? (Analyze)
- "How does the music build on the sound foundation?"
- "What does the writer mean by the "kitten"? (Analyze)
- "Why does the music have to stop?"
- "How does the music change when it starts up again?" (Compare and contrast)

#### **Vocabulary**

Write these musical vocabulary words on the chalkboard. Have volunteers look up definitions for each word and read the definitions to the group. Then have children use two of the words in a sentence to read to the class.

composer    harmony    soprano    melody    saxophone    tenor

### CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

#### **Music: More Coltrane**

Have some other Coltrane songs available for children to listen to. Ask them to listen for the melody and harmony and to identify the parts played by the saxophone. Children can discuss the songs and talk about which ones they like or dislike.

#### **Social Studies: Instrument History**

Have children choose a jazz instrument to research. Some possibilities are the saxophone, piano, bass, and trumpet. Children can choose other instruments if they wish. Help them to find information about the instrument in books or encyclopedias. They can write a brief history of the instrument to share with the class.

#### **Language Arts: Reviewing Coltrane**

Have children write a newspaper review of John Coltrane's music. In their review, they can describe Coltrane's sound and explain how the music makes them feel. Encourage them to include their opinions of the music and to support their opinions with reasons.

#### **Music: Comparing Versions**

Play the song "My Favorite Things" from the soundtrack to The Sound of Music. Children may be familiar with the song already. Point out that John Coltrane also does a version of this same song. Play Coltrane's version again for the class. Ask children to describe the two versions of the song, comparing them in terms of the way they treat the melody, their rhythm and speed, and the mood each song creates.

### INTERNET ACTIVITY

Before you send children to do research using any of the keywords listed below, you may wish to try them yourself to sure the sites are suitable.

#### **A Coltrane Biography**

Using the keywords "John Coltrane biography", children can learn more about the jazz musician on the Internet. Have them read about Coltrane's life and work and write a brief biography of him based on the information they find. Children might also enjoy listening to some Coltrane songs on the computer at the websites they find.