



"There is no better example of democracy than a jazz ensemble."
- Michelle Obama

The Jazz & Democracy Project® (J&D) utilizes jazz as a metaphor to cultivate a profound understanding of American democratic ideals. J&D brings American democracy to life, enriches the study and teaching of U.S. history, government, civics and culture, and inspires youth to become active, positive contributors to their communities.

THE PROGRAM

J&D is a music integrated curriculum linking the arts with humanities. Through literary, aural, visual and kinesthetic activities, students 10 years and older learn about the jazz process and how this mirrors elements of the democratic process. *Without needing any previous musical experience*, all J&D students understand what musicians must know and be able to do in order to create jazz, and how similar concepts are part of The U.S. Constitution, American democracy, and civic engagement in the 21st Century.

"When I came to class I expected a lecture on...jazz. But when we experienced hands-on movement, watched videos, learned the basic Blues, and heard what it meant to be a musician, it felt as real as I thought I could ever be to jazz."
- 9th Grader

THE BENEFITS

J&D routinely promotes meta-cognition as students evaluate their own actions and the skills necessary for an individual to participate effectively as a member of a group. J&D challenges students to provide evidence for their opinions, both verbally and in written form, as they synthesize learning from the arts and apply it to the humanities, and back again. Thus, J&D ignites creative and critical thinking through the use of interactive, multiple modality lessons. All the while, students are exposed to America's greatest artistic contribution to the world—jazz—as it becomes a lens to think critically about their membership and participation in local and global contexts.

"Students come away with real experiences about how they personally affect other people and work as teams. Additionally, J&D provides an essential and often overlooked window into the inner-workings of America's native art form that speaks to such important building blocks of our society: collectivity, freedom, structure, expression, improvisation."
- Zack Pitt-Smith, Music Teacher, Edna Brewer Middle School

HIGHLIGHTS

J&D has inspired thousands of children on three continents thanks to educational/performance tours with U.S. Embassies in Chile, The Gambia, Liberia, Haiti, Guatemala and Brazil. Locally, J&D was awarded a Certificate of Honor from Mayor Lee (R.I.P.) of San Francisco for hard work and dedication to the city's youth. J&D also pours some \$2,000 into the San Francisco Bay Area jazz community every semester, mainly through the hiring of local jazz musicians who play for and interact with J&D students on [Musician Day](#). And, in order to apply the improvisational spirit of jazz to democratic participation, students are also given the chance to [Democracy Jam®](#) with local professionals, politicians and community leaders who work in areas of student interest. Students hear first-hand life lessons about what it takes to make the impact on American democracy they seek, including necessary preparation in elementary and secondary schools, college and graduate studies, as well as internships and strategic networking.

"Wherever he goes—locally, nationally, internationally—Dr. Wes and J&D are an asset to the global jazz community." - Wynton Marsalis

THE INSTRUCTOR

Wesley J. Watkins, IV, Ph.D., or "Dr. Wes," as his students call him, is an avid music lover—especially jazz and Afro-Cuban jazz—who interviews top musicians in order to create exclusive J&D content, direct from the modern masters. After completing his Bachelor's Degree at Stanford University with Honors in the School of Education, Dr. Wes earned his Ph.D. from the International Centre for Research in Music Education at the University of Reading, England.

"Dr. Wes' course is fiercely interdisciplinary and quintessentially American. It's the American Studies course we all need to take." - Kabir Sehgal, Author of *Jazzocracy*

