

# Louis Armstrong

In this lesson, you will read about an American jazz legend. You'll learn some new vocabulary and discuss how young people develop their talents.

## Pre-Reading

### A. Warm-Up Questions

1. Do you play a musical instrument?  
If so, what do you play?
2. Do you like jazz?  
If so, who is your favourite jazz musician?
3. Do you know what a "reform school" is?
4. Do you own any Louis Armstrong music?
5. Do you know when Louis Armstrong first became popular?



### B. Vocabulary Preview

Match up as many words and meanings as you can.  
Check this exercise again after seeing the words in context on page 2.

- |                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| _____ 1. instrument | a) someone who does physical work                        |
| _____ 2. labourer   | b) to change   |
| _____ 3. local      | c) to take into police custody                           |
| _____ 4. recognize  | d) liked by many people                                  |
| _____ 5. talent     | e) something used for producing musical sounds           |
| _____ 6. record     | f) a natural ability                                     |
| _____ 7. popular    | g) in or of the area                                     |
| _____ 8. commercial | h) to keep for future use by putting on tape, film, etc. |
| _____ 9. arrest     | i) related to business                                   |
| _____ 10. reform    | j) to know   |

## Reading

1. Louis Armstrong is an American jazz legend.
2. Armstrong was born in 1901 in New Orleans, Louisiana. He grew up in a rough section of New Orleans, with little to eat and few clothes to wear. As a boy, Armstrong fell in love with jazz music. He decided to be a musician, but had no money to buy an **instrument**.
3. When Armstrong was about 12 years old, something happened that changed the direction of his life. On New Year's Eve, 1913, when Armstrong was celebrating, he fired a gun into the air. An angry police officer **arrested** him and he was sent to a **reform** school for boys. Fortunately, the school's musical director recognized Armstrong's talent and taught him to sing and play the cornet. After he was released from the boys' home, he worked as a **labourer** by day and played with **local** bands at night. He borrowed a horn until he had money to buy one.
4. By 1918, Armstrong was playing on riverboats and with good black bands around New Orleans. In 1922, he moved to Chicago to play with the Creole Jazz Band, a legend in jazz circles. In 1923, Armstrong divorced his first wife to marry Lillian Hardin, who **recognized** his musical talent and encouraged him to develop his career. The next year, they moved to New York and Armstrong joined the Fletcher Henderson Band. His musical **talent** grew quickly during this time.
5. In 1925, Armstrong went back to Chicago. Between 1925 and 1928, he recorded the "Hot Five" series of jazz records. Many people think this is the best jazz ever **recorded**. Armstrong became a role model for many jazz players.
6. In the early 1930s, Armstrong started to travel all over the United States and Europe and soon became one of the most famous men in America. In the 1930s and 1940s, Armstrong played and sang with his own big dance band. He became known as much for his singing as his playing. He also appeared in movies and on the radio.
7. By 1945, big bands were no longer **popular**, so Armstrong formed a smaller group called the All Stars. His popularity and his **commercial** success grew throughout the 1950s and 1960s. His 1964 record, "Hello, Dolly," and the 1968 song, "What a Wonderful World," both became number one hits.
8. Armstrong was married two more times, in 1938 to Alpha Smith and in 1942 to Lucille Wilson. He had no children. He died in 1971.

*"All music is folk music. I ain't never heard a horse sing a song."*

—Louis Armstrong

## Comprehension

### A. True or False?

Read the statements below.

If the statement is true, write T beside the sentence.

If it is false, write F and correct the information in your notebook.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Louis Armstrong had a difficult childhood.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Armstrong bought his first musical instrument when he was a young boy.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Armstrong started playing in jazz bands when he was a teenager.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Armstrong was married five times.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Louis Armstrong had a big influence on other jazz musicians.

### B. Ask & Answer

Practise asking and answering the following questions with your partner.

Then write your answers in complete sentences in your notebook.

- 1. What was Louis Armstrong's childhood like?
- 2. Why was Louis Armstrong sent to a reform school?
- 3. Where did he first learn to play a musical instrument and what instrument was it?
- 4. What influence did Armstrong's second wife have on him?
- 5. Why were the years 1925 to 1928 important in Armstrong's career?
- 6. What did Armstrong do in the 1930s and 1940s?
- 7. How did his career develop in the 1950s and 1960s?

## Vocabulary Practice

Choose the word or phrase with the closest meaning to the underlined word or phrase in the following sentences.

- Armstrong grew up in a rough section of New Orleans.
  - a big apartment building
  - a troubled area
  - a rich neighbourhood
- While celebrating on New Year's Eve, Armstrong fired a gun into the air.
  - burned
  - shot
  - threw
- Armstrong learned to play the cornet when he was in a boys' home.
  - a type of piano
  - a type of musical horn
  - a type of violin
- After he was released, he worked as a labourer by day and played music at night.
  - studied
  - got older
  - was allowed to go free
- He moved to Chicago to play with the Creole Jazz Band, a legend in jazz circles.
  - school
  - something very famous
  - radio show
- The Creole Jazz Band was a legend in jazz circles.
  - round
  - cities
  - groups of people with the same interests
- His 1964 record, "Hello Dolly," was a number one hit.
  - big success
  - movie
  - something unpopular
- Armstrong was a role model for many jazz players.
  - singer
  - movie actor
  - excellent example

## Discussion

- Do you think that sending a boy to a reform school for two years for shooting a gun into the air is a good punishment? Explain your answer.
- Do you think that Louis Armstrong's life might have been very different if he hadn't been sent to the boys' school?
- How can society encourage young people from poor neighbourhoods to develop their talents?
- Louis Armstrong was married four times. Why do you think many famous entertainers and actors get divorced so often?