APOLLO EDUCATION

APOLLO THEATER WALK OF FAME LEGEND

STEVIE WONDER

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Close your eyes, open your ears, and imagine music appearing as a vision in your mind. For Stevland Hardaway Morris, born in Saginaw, Michigan on May 13, 1950, music not only captured his imagination, it became his way of seeing and understanding the world.

Losing his sight shortly after birth, he developed a heightened sense of hearing and became fascinated with musical instruments from an early age. "When I hear music," he once stated, "I can see it, each instrument has its own color." By age ten, he taught himself to play the bongos, drum set, harmonica, and piano, in addition to singing in his church's choir.

Moving to Detroit, Michigan when he was young, anyone who heard him perform considered him a **child prodigy**, including the owner of Detroit's Motown Records, Berry Gordy. In 1961, Gordy signed 11 year old Stevland to Motown under the name "Little Stevie Wonder", in recognition of the young man's remarkable talent. Soon after, Stevie was touring the U.S. and dazzling audiences everywhere he performed.

Appearing at the Apollo Theater for the first time in 1962, as part of Motown's Motortown Revue, Stevie brought the house down with his breakout hit, "Fingertips, Part 2". The song went on to sell over one million copies and top the **Billboard Hot 100** for three straight weeks in 1963. At 13 years old, he became the youngest solo artist ever to have a No. 1 hit in the U.S., a record he still holds to this day.

Stevie refused to be categorized by his youth, and insisted "Little" be dropped from his name. While hit singles like "Uptight (Everything's Alright)" and "For Once In My Life" helped make him a pop-culture icon by the end of the 1960s, the creative genius of "Stevie Wonder" took shape in ways the world had never seen during the 1970s.

Signing a new contract with Motown in 1971, Stevie gained complete artistic control over his music. He experimented with revolutionary new instruments including the Moog synthesizer, an electric keyboard which Stevie claimed, "directly expressed what was in his mind." Additionally, he revolutionized the practice of "overdubbing," a recording process in which he played each instrument on a song and sang all his own vocal parts.

In 2009, he was appointed a United Nations Messenger of Peace,

"CLASSIC PERIOD"

Between 1972 and 1976, Stevie Wonder recorded five albums that changed the course of popular music forever: *Music of My Mind, Talking Book, Innervisions, Fulfillingness' First Finale,* and *Songs in the Key of Life.* With the release of hits like "Superstition" and "Sir Duke", Stevie's **"Classic Period"** produced 15 top 40 singles (eight of which became No. 1).

recognized for his efforts to commemorate Dr. King's birthday, as well as his outspokenness against **Apartheid in South Africa**. In 2014, President Barack Obama presented him with the Presidential Medal of Freedom in honor of his **social activism**, the highest award a U.S. civilian can receive.

Among his many other accomplishments, he has sold over one hundred million records and won 25 **GRAMMY** awards, including the Lifetime Achievement Award. Stevie Wonder was inducted into The Apollo Theater Walk of Fame in 2011 and to this day, he continues to inspire audiences with the music of his mind.

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Stevie's music addressed political and social concerns. In 1980, he released the song "Happy Birthday" in support of a campaign to designate the birthday of Martin Luther King Jr. as a U.S. federal holiday. Thanks largely to Stevie's efforts, in 1983 Congress passed a bill marking the third Monday in January of every year, **Martin Luther King Jr. Day**.

WORDS TO KNOW

Child Prodigy – Someone who displays extraordinary talent from a young age.

Billboard Hot 100 – Billboard Magazine's weekly list of the most popular songs in the U.S.

Apartheid in South Africa – A period of racial segregation in South Africa (1948-91), enforced upon non-whites by the country's all-white government.

Social Activism – To take action in support of a social cause that you believe in.

GRAMMY – Originally named "Gramophone Award" after the gramophone record player, a GRAMMY is one of the highest honors an artist can receive in the U.S. music industry.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Secret Life of Plants

In 1979, "Stevie Wonder's Journey Through the Secret Life of Plants" was one of the first digitally recorded albums of popular music ever created. The album was a soundtrack to the documentary, "The Secret Life of Plants". Knowing he couldn't view the film's floral imagery himself, he composed the music with the help of colleagues who described images from the film to him.

Apollo Debut

In December of 1962, "Little Stevie Wonder" was so nervous to appear at the Apollo for the first time, he dropped his bongos during the middle of his performance! He's since made many return appearances to the theater, and is one of the most celebrated performers in the Apollo's legendary history.

Isn't She Lovely?

As a kid, Stevie never let his inability to see slow him down. In fact, he was often one step ahead of the rest. He was known to pull a few practical jokes from time to time, often on unexpecting victims who didn't see his pranks coming.

Around the Motown studios for example, he would compliment a lady on the color of her dress, as if he could see her. Little did she know, that Stevie's friends had informed him of the color beforehand!

DO NOW

1. Stevie once stated, "When I hear music, I can see it, each instrument has its own color."
Review the instrument descriptions below. What colors (or combinations of colors) do you think best represent each instrument?

INSTRUMENT	DESCRIPTION	COLOR
Electric Guitar	Loud and Fiery	
Electric Bass	Low and Cool	
Moog Synthesizer	Funky and Fresh	
Drums	Big and Bold	
Horns	High and Bright	

2. What an Honor!
Stevie Wonder is one of three Apollo Theater Walk of Fame Legends to be honored with both a GRAMMY Lifetime Achievement Award AND the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2014. Can you figure out which two legends share the same distinction?

☐ James Brown ☐ Ella Fitzgerald ☐ Little Richard
☐ Gladys Knight ☐ Louis Armstrong ☐ Aretha Franklin
☐ Smokey Robinson ☐ Patti LaBelle

3. Sir Duke and Friends
In his song "Sir Duke", Stevie Wonder references the following music pioneers, all of whom influenced his music greatly: Basie, Miller, Satchmo, Sir Duke, and Ella.
With a partner, can you figure out the pioneers Stevie is referencing in "Sir Duke"? What style of music did they perform?

One way or another, all styles of music are rooted in music that preceded it. With your partner, research what styles influenced the music you listen to today. Who are the pioneers of each style?

Answer: Ella Fitzgerald and Aretha Franklin

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Photo Credits
Cover photo: Shahar Azran, page 3: Fotocollectie ANP (ANeFo), Page 2: Jac. de Nijs/Anefo, Nationaal Archief

Designed by
Van Gennep Design

Leadership support for Apollo Education Programs provided by

The Ronald O. Perelman Family Foundation

THE Coca-Cola FOUNDATION

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Generous support from Apollo EmpowerHer, Conscious Kids Inc., Con Edison, Ella Fitzgerald Charitable Foundation, Insperity, The Reginald F. Lewis Foundation, Ellis L. Phillips Foundation, The Pinkerton Foundation, public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, and New York State Council on the arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

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