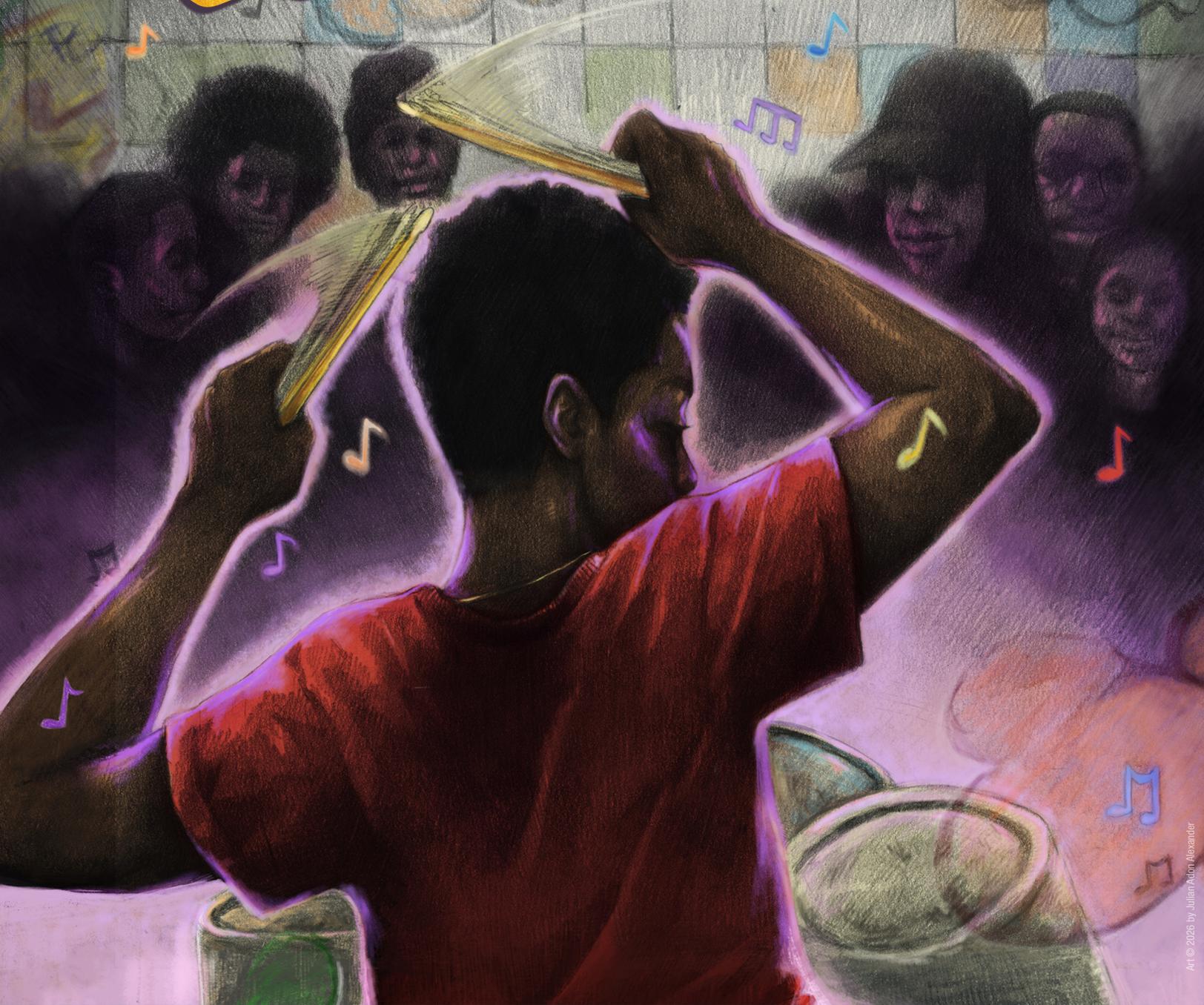


#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

JASON REYNOLDS

Soundtrack

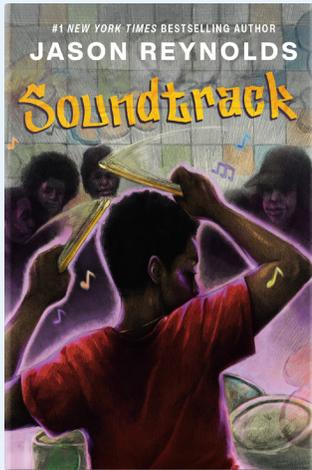


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EDUCATORS' GUIDE

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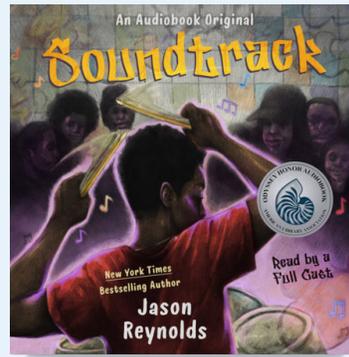
About the Book

From the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Long Way Down* comes a powerful print adaptation of the acclaimed, award-winning audiobook *Soundtrack*—a stirring story of music, friendship, and finding your voice in 2000s New York City.

Stuy Grey plays the drums, just like his mom, a founding member of the all-black punk band the Bed-Stuy Magic Dusters. He teaches himself by watching videos of tap dancers. Now he's left home, estranged from his mom and her abusive boyfriend. He's camping out with his uncle on the Lower East Side. His landlord, Dunks, has chops: He shreds on only five strings. Add Alexis on bass guitar and Keith on horn: These teens are a band, busking in New York City subway stations to scrape enough money to record an album.

As their popularity grows, so do the pressures, from complicated family dynamics to the glare of unexpected public attention. And when the police start looking for their bassist, Stuy faces his toughest decision yet.

Adapted from the acclaimed Listening Library original audiobook and written with Jason Reynolds's signature rhythm, heart, and honesty, *Soundtrack: A Novel* is a raw, resonant story about friendship, creativity, and what it truly means to find, and fight for, your voice.



About the Audiobook

#1 *New York Times* bestselling author Jason Reynolds transports us back to the early 2000s in *Soundtrack*, an audiobook original

about New York City teens whose talent and love of music lift them to unexpected heights.

Stuy wanted to play the drums just like his mom, a founding member of the punk band The Bed-Stuy Magic Dusters. First taught by his mother, as a teen Stuy starts busking in the subway with his friends Dunks, Alexis, Keith, and Frankie under the name *Soundtrack*. To everyone's surprise, including their own, they become an underground sensation, and their success changes the course of their lives.

Read by a full cast and with an original score by Grammy-winning composer Justin Ellington, award-winning author Jason Reynolds shows us a found family coming of age in a wonderfully complex city.

CAST LIST

Nile Bullock as Stuy	Nadine Simmons as Mrs. Dyson
Mekhi Hewling as Dunks	Robb Moreira as Mr. Garcia
Jade Williams as Keith	Wé Ani as Lisa
Brandon Miles as Alexis	Rocky Anicette as Dylan
Ryan Vincent Anderson as Uncle Lucky	Brandiss Seward as Frankie's Mom
Amir Royale as Frankie	with Siho Ellsmore, Tyrell Buckner, Gina Daniels, Karen Murray, Jonathan Beville, Karla Moore, and Ronald Peet
Jasmin Richardson as Stuy's Mom	
Christopher Grant as Dom	
Khaya Fraites as Ashley	



Adedayo "Dayo" Kosoko

About the Author

Jason Reynolds is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of more than twenty books for children and young adults. A 2024 MacArthur Fellow, Jason is best known for his novels, including the *New York Times* bestseller *Twenty-Four Seconds from Now . . .*, which received the Coretta Scott King Author Award and seven starred reviews; *Long Way Down*, which received Newbery, Printz, and Coretta Scott King Honors; *All American Boys* (co-written with Brendan Kiely), which received a Coretta Scott King Author Honor and the Walter Dean Myers Award for Outstanding Children's Literature; and the *Track* series, of which the first book, *Ghost*, was a finalist for the National Book Award for Young People's Literature. For more on Jason, visit him on Instagram at @jasonreynolds83 and at JasonWritesBooks.com.





Note to Teachers

Soundtrack was published as an original audiobook with full-cast narration and original music as well as a young adult novel. Both formats are uniquely structured, creating an experience that helps readers visualize the characters and setting. As students read the book, listening to select chapters or the whole book can provide wider access and engagement. Young people will gain insight into the interior lives of the characters who navigate New York City, an environment bustling with a cacophony of noises, and come together as musicians to become the soundtrack of their city.

This guide includes discussion questions that are organized by interconnected themes, as well as activities and topics for further exploration.

Interconnected Discussion Questions by Theme

Identity

I was pretending I wasn't hype. Making an album in one of these places that my heroes did was my dream. I mean, playing music was really my dream, but making an album—a real album to live forever—that's something different. (p. 73)

- A brief snapshot of the main characters is provided in the prologue as Stuy shares his ideas about the start of a movie about his life. What insights does the prologue provide about the characters? How would the movie about your life begin?
- Developing a musical identity is a journey of self-discovery, experimentation, and dedication to one's craft. Discuss the people who shape Stuy's musical identity—those who are in his life, as well as those he has never met. How do they influence him as a musician? How do they influence him as a person?
- Our identities are shaped by a variety of factors including our beliefs, backgrounds, relationships, past and present traumas, motivations, and cultural and social positioning. Discuss how the bandmates in *Soundtrack* see themselves and how others see them. Create an identity profile on one or more characters. Consider the following questions as you learn about the characters' backstories, track patterns of behaviors, and identify internal and external pressures to understand their motivations.
 - What is their full name and its significance?
 - How does their age affect their outlook?
 - Who is part of their inner circle?
 - In addition to being a musician, what is their occupation or daily activity?
 - What do you recognize as their greatest strengths and areas of challenge?
 - What past wounds affect them?
 - What's their biggest fear/secret/regret?
 - How do they fit into the social structures of their environment?
 - What are their cultural traditions or values? How does race, gender, class, or disability affect how they move through the world and are perceived by others?
 - What are they willing to sacrifice for their goal?
 - Who is the most important person in their life, and why?
 - What events (trauma, success, love, loss) shape them?
- Consider the characteristics of each of the instruments played in the band: drums, electric guitar, bass guitar, horn. In what ways do they reflect the traits of the individuals who play them?
- How does Frankie use his voice as an instrument, and how is this representative of his identity?

Family

But when the rest of the band stepped up for Alexis, I felt like my sister needed to know that these people were my siblings too. (p. 213)

- The members of Soundtrack come from a range of both traditional and nontraditional family structures, each complex and dynamic.
 - Consider some of the band members and their relationships with family members.
Stuy: Mother, Uncle Lucky, Sister
Dunks: Father, Mother
Alexis: Mother, Father
 - How would you characterize these relationships?
 - How do they influence each character’s development?
 - How do the characters react to their circumstances and work to preserve familial relationships even when it’s difficult to do so?
- The saying “There’s the family you have and the family you choose” distinguishes between the family you’re raised in and your chosen family.
 - Discuss the ways the members of Soundtrack choose each other as family and cultivate their relationships.
 - When do they prioritize each other’s offers of genuine love, acceptance, and healthy support over their relatives?

Friendship

I forgot to mention, we also made up a secret handshake that we all could do. It’s kind of a big part of being in a band. Gotta have a special shake—something that ties everybody together, that only we know. (p. 93)

- Stuy, Dunks, Keith, Alexis, and Frankie are multilayered characters. What are some of the surprising discoveries that the characters make about each other, and how do these epiphanies demonstrate their deepening understandings of each other?
- Discuss moments when one character has a revelation or new appreciation for another character. What do those moments reveal about who the character is becoming as a person?
- Dunks processes information and sees the world in unique ways. In what ways does he push the boundaries of what is considered conventional? How does this friendship challenge and change Stuy?

- Both Stuy and Dunks have fragile relationships with their mothers and fathers who have disappointed them. How does this add a key layer to their friendship? How is their relationship an example of the importance of young men having friendships where they feel safe to express the full range of their emotions?
- Notice moments when band members step out of their comfort zones personally and musically. What is the catalyst for this? How does this result in pushing the limits of their friendship and artistic boundaries?

Music

So we were a band. A real band. Drums, guitar, bass, trumpet, and Frankie. Yes, Frankie was one of us, even though we didn’t really know what exactly he was going to do yet. But it didn’t matter. He was a bandmate. (p. 83)

- An epigraph is a short statement that is included at the beginning of a novel. It could be a sentence, a paragraph, or even a poem. The words of an epigraph are written by someone other than the author of the novel. They spark our interest, provoke questions, and suggest a powerful theme in a text. The epigraph in *Soundtrack* is part of the lyrics of “Off the Wall” by Michael Jackson.¹ How does this epigraph provide insight into the story that unfolds in *Soundtrack*? Read all of the lyrics for additional points of connection.
- The members of Soundtrack have a deep appreciation for a wide variety of artists. How does this interplay of musical styles and their unique ideas lead to their evolution and progression as a band?
- The bandmates draw inspiration not only from established musicians they admire but from each other. They explore new realms of creativity by harnessing their emotions and translating them through their chosen instrument. During a pivotal performance where the idea for the name of the band emerges, Keith tells Stuy, “Just play whatever you think goes with the way you’re feeling, man. Like, like a soundtrack for it all.”
 - Discuss the individual and shared experiences of the bandmates that contribute to a wellspring of inspiration for their music.

¹Michael Jackson is a controversial person. Anticipate that students may want to acknowledge this and consider ways to make space for this conversation.

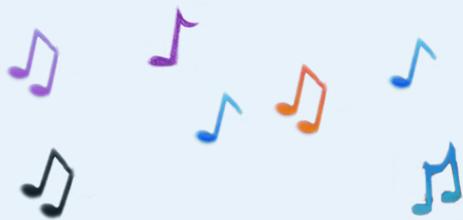
- How does trust, individual and collective perspectives, and collaboration create dynamic conditions for Soundtrack’s creative exploration?
- How does leaning into each other as a spark for innovation and creativity strengthen their musical skills and their bond as a band?
- Frankie asserts that the band doesn’t just make music; they make magic. How does the name Soundtrack encapsulate the essence of the band, including their individual experiences and the magic they create collectively?

Violence

“Yeah, man. Ol’ boy smacking around on my mom. And she talking ‘bout, ‘Don’t do nothing, Stuy. Let it go, Stuy.’ What the hell kinda mess is that?” (p. 102)

- Violence can manifest in various forms and can occur frequently in relationships or as an isolated event such as during an argument where harsh words are used in the heat of the moment. A pattern of abuse is characterized by one person exerting power and control over another to dominate and demean them using tactics such as physical violence, emotional manipulation (insults, gaslighting, isolation), financial control, digital harassment, sexual force, intimidation, stalking, and more. Discuss the ways violence, indirectly and directly, permeates the lives of the characters.
- Consider the following relationships. Which actions or inactions impact a character’s self-worth, freedom, and safety?

– Stuy and his mother	– Alexis and Dom
– Stuy and his father	– Keith and Stuy
– Stuy and Uncle Lucky	– Dunks and his mother
– Stuy and Dom	– Dunks and his father
– Stuy’s mother and Dom	
- What insights does the book offer about power, resilience, and healing?



Community

The one thing that I’m glad we didn’t do when we first got together was start all that social media stuff for the band. (It was definitely next on the to-do list.) Like, we didn’t have a social media page or anything like that, so all the hype that was building around us was happening the old-school way—word of mouth. (p. 137)

- Music is the glue that bonds together the bandmates of Soundtrack. They also nurture their interpersonal relationships. Discuss the routines and rituals that fortify the community they build for themselves.
- Part of Soundtrack’s magic is the grassroots movement they cultivate where ordinary people with a passion for music use word of mouth to share information about when and where the band performs. Identify and discuss the following skills the band develops that contribute to their success. Include additional skills you notice.
 - mobilization methods
 - local organizing
 - activation of volunteer power
 - problem solving
 - growing an audience
- In 2011, the year when *Soundtrack* takes place, the social media landscape was burgeoning. Popular platforms during this time included Facebook, Snapchat, and Twitter. How might today’s access to social media and the variety of platforms impact the band?
- What are the strengths, challenges, and limitations of a grassroots following and a social media following in terms of community-building? Where is there overlap?
- Before each performance Frankie introduces the band and gets the crowd to chant “We are Soundtrack” along with them.
 - What is the significance of the shift from Stuy originally asserting, “This is the soundtrack” to “We are Soundtrack”?
 - How does an understanding of who is part of the “we” evolve across the story and why?
 - How does this shift help the band differentiate between building an audience and building a community where they cultivate relationships with listeners?

Improvisation

And then, out of nowhere, Frankie earned his spot in the band. As we all scrambled—me grabbing buckets, Dunks snatching cords from the amp, Alexis rushing to put his bass back in its case—Frankie came to Keith and suggested something genius. “Yo, why don’t we go underground.” (p. 91)

- The band’s ability to improvise is critical for survival through obstacles, learning new skills, and understanding their inner selves. How does *Soundtrack*’s creative, moment-to-moment decisions help them evolve as musicians who are able to let go, embrace chaos, and discover the joys of creative freedom?
- Discuss how the band adapts to the spontaneity of their lives, turning acceptance of impermanence into a powerful musical and life practice.
 - How does improvising help them to navigate difficult situations?
 - Are there parts of their personalities that appear when they improvise that wouldn’t otherwise be expressed?

- Frankie’s death deeply impacts his friends who became family. Soundtrack will never be able to replace Frankie or duplicate his magic. How do you imagine the band will evolve after this monumental loss?
- How does the mirroring of the prologue at the end of *Soundtrack* spotlight the growth and evolution of its characters?
- Discuss what is left unresolved and how you imagine the characters addressing those issues.
- What have the characters acquired at the end that was lacking at the beginning of the story? What have they lost?



Extension & Explorations

Busking

The ride to Harlem was a strange one only because it was packed with other subway performers. It was Friday, and for subway performers, they knew on Fridays everybody got paid, which meant they could get paid too. (p. 204)

Buskers are street performers who entertain in public places for money or for food or gifts. In cities across the world, buskers perform a wide variety of acts, including music, juggling, magic, and living statues, turning public spaces into temporary stages for their art. This practice is ancient and global, and many famous entertainers began their careers as buskers. Learn more about the practice of busking.

- *Soundtrack* is set in New York City, which has a vibrant and complex history of busking. Learn more about the history of busking in NYC. [What It's Like Performing in the NYC Subway: Busking](#).
- What are the unique joys, challenges, and rewards of busking?

- In a busy city such as NYC, what are some of the unique skills that buskers develop to grab the attention of an audience who did not necessarily choose to attend or participate in these performances?
- Some of the most famous musicians today started out as buskers performing on streets and in subway stations in NYC, Philadelphia, London, and other cities. Explore the origins of The Roots and Ed Sheeran, who journeyed from busker to global phenomenon.
 - [The Roots](#) - The Roots | Kennedy Center
 - [Ed Sheeran](#)
- Buskers want to share their gifts with those who will listen. Many buskers do not become global superstars, and that isn’t necessarily their goal. Who are the buskers in your city? After reading *Soundtrack*, how might you engage and enjoy the talents of buskers?

Mentors

I went to YouTube and looked up clips of some of my favorite tap dancers. Yes, tap dancers. It's something my mother got me hooked on when I was younger. It wasn't about how dope they were as dancers, but what kinds of sounds and rhythms they could come up with. So I just listened to Sammy Davis Jr., Gregory Hines, the Slyde Brothers, and my all-time favorite, Savion Glover. Their feet were like drumsticks creating the most incredible beats, and I used it as inspiration to try different things when I was playing. Usually, drummers listen to drummers, but for me, this was better. (p. 48)

In *Soundtrack*, Stuy watches and studies performances by tap dancers and musicians and is inspired by their rhythms, which he incorporates into his drumming.

His bandmates are also greatly influenced by artists they admire. Although they only know these artists through YouTube clips they watch repeatedly and by listening to their music, these creators are mentors to them in music and in life.

- Research one or more of the famous artists the members of Soundtrack look up to. Watch their performances and discuss what they offer as mentors.
- How does the improvisational quality of jazz and studying the art of Savion Glover and others help the bandmates to discover their own unique style and self-expression?
- Who are your mentors? Even if you've never met them, how do they influence you to be your best?

Performer	Biographical Snapshot	Select Performances
<p>Savion Glover (1973-)</p>	<p>Savion Glover is known for his musicality as a dancer, specifically his drummer-like approach to tap dancing. Glover learned to drum at age three, danced with tap dancing legends as a teenager, starred in hit Broadway musicals, has won prestigious awards including a Tony, and is a choreographer and teacher. Glover's influence on dance and music is unparalleled. Glover has shared: "I'm a dancer who plays the music. I'm a musician that dances. I like exploring the melodies, the different sounds. I like to get feedback from the floor. It's that heard versus seen thing. I'm going for being heard."</p> <p><u>Floored: Tap dancer Savion Glover and drummer Jack DeJohnette In Concert santafenewmexican.com</u></p>	<p><u>Tap Dancer Savion Glover's Big Break on PBS with Legends Like Gregory Hines and Jimmy Slyde (5:39)</u></p> <p><u>Savion Glover Tap Dances To The Beat Of The City Kids (1999) - MDA Telethon (5:08)</u></p> <p><u>Savion Glover's Solo at the NJ Performance Arts Center (1997) (5:39)</u></p> <p><u>Tap dance Gregory Hines and Savion Glover (:40)</u></p>
<p>Gregory Hines (1946–2003)</p>	<p>Gregory Hines, known for his smooth, intricate rhythms, was a trailblazer who brought tap dancing back into mainstream popularity during the late twentieth century. Hines was a celebrated Broadway and film actor, singer, and choreographer and mentor of Savion Glover. Hines was a Tony Award winner for his role in <i>Jelly's Last Jam</i>.</p> <p><u>Biography of Gregory Hines The New York Public Library</u></p>	<p><u>Gregory Hines - Tap in America (4:21)</u></p> <p><u>Gregory Hines Tap Dance (3:39)</u></p> <p><u>Gregory Hines - The Joyce NYC 1986 (Part 1) (2:52)</u></p>

Performer	Biographical Snapshot	Select Performances
<p>Sammy Davis Jr. (1925–1990)</p>	<p>Sammy Davis Jr. was an entertainment legend. He was an accomplished tap dancer, television and film actor, Broadway headliner, impressionist, multi-instrumentalist, and bestselling author. As his fame grew, Davis refused to appear in clubs that practiced racial segregation and was active in the Civil Rights Movement.</p> <p>About – Sammy Davis Jr Official</p>	<p>Sammy Davis Jr. Tap Dancing – Italy 1962 (4:06)</p> <p>Tap Dancing / Me and My Shadow– Sammy Davis Jr. 1972 (2:33)</p> <p>The “Challenge” from Tap 1989 – Sammy Davis Jr. & Gregory Hines Tap Dancing (2:19) (pg. 186 from text)</p>
<p>Jimmy Slyde (1927–2008)</p>	<p>Jimmy Slyde, celebrated tap dancer, formed the dance pair the Slyde Brothers with Jimmy “Sir Slyde” Mitchell, a fellow student. Slyde toured with big bands in clubs throughout the United States in the late 1940s and early 1950s, performing regularly with Duke Ellington and Count Basie. Slyde was a mentor to many, including Savion Glover.</p> <p>Jimmy Slyde, Tap–Dancing Master, Dies at 80 Playbill</p>	<p>Jimmy Slyde – Excerpt from About Tap (1985) Pt 1 (1:26)</p> <p>Jimmy Slyde “Here’s That Rainy Day” 1977 (2:40)</p> <p>Jimmy Slyde at the White House (3:57)</p>
<p>Jimi Hendrix (1942–1970)</p>	<p>Jimi Hendrix is widely considered one of the most innovative and influential musicians of the twentieth century. As a guitarist, singer, and songwriter, Hendrix amazed audiences with his outrageous electric guitar playing skills and his experimental sound. Hendrix learned to play guitar as a teenager, and although he was unable to read music, he grew up to become a rock legend whose influence continues today.</p> <p>Jimi Hendrix Biography – The Official Jimi Hendrix Site</p>	<p>The Jimi Hendrix Experience – Purple Haze (Live at the Atlanta Pop Festival)</p> <p>Jimi Hendrix – Freedom (Live at the Atlanta Pop Festival)</p> <p>Jimi Hendrix – The Star Spangled Banner [National Anthem] (Live at Woodstock 1969)</p>
<p>Miles Davis (1926–1991)</p>	<p>Miles Davis was a Grammy Award–winning trumpet player and bandleader. His influence on the jazz world is unparalleled, and his style has become the standard for generations of musicians and has shaped the world of improvisational music.</p> <p>Timeline Miles Davis Official Site</p>	<p>Tutu (live) Miles Davis</p> <p>Miles Davis – Summertime (with Quincy Jones & Orchestra Live At Montreux 1991) ~ 1080p HD</p> <p>Miles performing “One Phone Call / Street Scenes” live at Amnesty International #milesdavis – YouTube</p>

Performer	Biographical Snapshot	Select Performances
<p>Louis Armstrong (1901–1971)</p>	<p>Louis Armstrong, nicknamed Satchmo, was an international trumpeter and singer who made dozens of recordings with other famous jazz musicians. Known for his unique trumpet style and distinct, gravelly voice, Armstrong is credited with helping to usher in the era of jazz big bands and influencing countless musicians.</p> <p><u>Biography - Louis Armstrong House Museum</u></p>	<p><u>Louis Armstrong & Duke Ellington "In A Mellow Tone" on The Ed Sullivan Show</u></p> <p><u>Louis Armstrong - Hello, Dolly! (At The BBC)</u></p> <p><u>Louis Armstrong - Someday [Live]</u></p>

NYC Subway System

The day had faded to a dark blue, the lights of the cars and bicycle reflectors shooting all around us. The smoke in the air changed with every few steps, from cigarette, to halal meat, to exhaust pipes, to incense, all of which were like us, just floating along. (p. 258)

- New York City is more than the setting in the book *Soundtrack*. It serves as a vibrant backdrop with iconic locations, particularly within the subway system and stations. Discuss the ways NYC functions as a character that influences the band's daily lives, relationships, and adventures.
- Explore the newly updated [NYC subway map](#) and look for some of the iconic locations where *Soundtrack* performed, such as Union Square, 125th Street, West 4th Street, and Times Square. What are your impressions? What is the most distinctive feature of the map? How easy or challenging do you think it is for those who live in or are visiting New York City to use the NYC subway system?
- Visit the [Transit Museum Digital Exhibits](#) to learn more about the NYC transit system past and present. In what ways has the development and growth of the NYC subway system revolutionized life for its residents and visitors?

About the Guide Writer

*Dr. Sonja Cherry-Paul is the founder of Red Clay Educators. She adapted the #1 New York Times bestseller *Stamped (For Kids)*, the New York Times bestselling adaptation of *How The Word Is Passed*, and is the author of several books for educators that support adolescent literacy development including the bestseller *Antiracist Reading Revolution: A Framework for Teaching Beyond Representation Toward Liberation*. She is codirector of the Institute for Racial Equity in Literacy, codirector of the Teach Black History All Year Institute, and executive producer and host of *The Black Creators Series*, an education-focused content platform that highlights the work of Black authors and illustrators. Sonja is a sought-after speaker who partners with schools, communities, and organizations to provide professional development that advances the work of antiracism and equity. Follow Sonja on social media (@SonjaCherryPaul and @RedClayEd) and visit her website: sonjacherrypaul.com.*



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