

STUDY GUIDE: Jennifer Hudson

This study guide is to support virtual and in-person classes for students and teachers inspired by the movie *Respect* about the life of Aretha Franklin.

Overview and Learning Objectives

In her master class, Jennifer Hudson describes how playing Aretha Franklin was a dream come true for her. This study guide explores the ways that Jennifer Hudson's personal and professional life prepared her to play Aretha Franklin. The learning objective: students will learn how elements of African American music and culture shaped the musical style of both Aretha Franklin and Jennifer Hudson.

Essential Questions

- What opportunities did Black churches provide for musical training?
- How did gospel music and soul music impact the Civil Rights movement?
- How well-prepared was Jennifer Hudson to play Aretha Franklin? Why?

Suggested Student Activities

Imagine that you, like Jennifer Hudson, have been called upon to portray Aretha Franklin in a biopic. What kind of preparation is necessary to play the part? If you could go back in time, what knowledge and experiences would you need to help you prepare? The following activities will help you prepare in different ways and shed light on relevant Africentric cultural values.

Unit 1. What's In A Name? *Communalism*

These activities prepare you to play your part by giving you a sense of community.

Activity 1. Define the Africentric value of Communalism (see Key Terms).

Activity 2. Aretha Franklin is known as the Queen of Soul and Jennifer Hudson as the Princess of Soul.

Read the excerpts below about naming in Black culture:

"... respect has always been an essential part of African and African American culture. The respect for adults and elders was demonstrated in numerous ways. One way was to acknowledge them first with a greeting upon entering a room by addressing them by appropriate titles. During slavery Africans were not given titles of respect by whites. They were never addressed as "ladies" or "gentlemen," "Sir" or "Ma'am", 'Mister' or 'Miss' or "Mrs.," so they conferred their own designation of respect. They addressed one another as "Big Mama," and "Big Daddy," "Madea," "Sister" or "Brother" to convey honor." Liseli A. Fitzpatrick, B.A., [African Names and Naming Practices: The Impact Slavery and European Domination had on the African Psyche, Identity and Protest](#), Dissertation, The Ohio State University, 2012, p. 53-54.

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“Nicknaming is an important way in which Black people acquire new names reflecting characteristics and events of their lives that add to their identity in the eyes of those people who bestow the name, as the Fon of West Africa acquired additional names with successive events and accomplishments. The Bs in B.B. King’s name stand for ‘Blues Boy.’ To express a sense of socially sanctioned superiority, many whites - especially in the South - tried to deprive Blacks of their dignity by calling them only by their first name, whatever their age, and however elevated their educational and socio-economic status... A mechanism developed by Blacks to deal with this attitude on the part of whites and to subvert it as best they could was to name their children actual titles... Military and royal titles were given as first names so that whites could not avoid using terms of respect for Blacks. Thus people named their children General, Major, Sargeant, King, Queen and Prince. The organizer of the first Black masonic lodge was Prince Hall, and it is no accident that the nicknames of two jazz greats are aristocratic titles - ‘Duke’ Ellington and ‘Count’ Basie. There’s also ‘Lady Day’ and Nat ‘King’ Cole.” Sheila S. Walker, "[What’s in a Name? Black awareness Keeps the African tradition of 'meaningful names' alive](#)," Ebony Volume 32 (8), June 1977, p. 75.

Activity 3. Have students form pairs, discuss their own and each other’s musical strengths, choose honorifics and/or nicknames for each other that reflect those strengths and create a written profile with their real name, their new nickname and the qualities behind it. The nickname must be positive and make the students feel special and appreciated. Use this [Wikipedia article](#) for ideas.

See [Addendum](#) for Unit 1 Extended Activities.

Unit 2. What Sounds Are In My Ears? *Orality*

These activities prepare you to play your part by immersing you in gospel music.

Activity 1. Watch the Good Morning America clip (2:28) which reveals that Franklin [hand-picked](#) Hudson to play her in the biopic. Ask students to list in a shared document, in bullet form, reasons Franklin might have hand-picked Hudson, based on what students learned in the master class, the What’s In A Name Activity and the biographies of Franklin and Hudson.

Activity 2. Define the Africentric value of Orality (see Key Terms) and discuss its relationship to call and response.

Activity 3. In the master class, Hudson mentions having sung ‘Aretha’ songs growing up. Walk students through the seven forms of call and response they’ll hear in the [West Angeles COGIC](#) video medley. Use Unit 2-Activity 2 Key and Chart to exemplify the types by playing the indicated clips.

Activity 4. Play the [West Angeles COGIC](#) video medley of three Black church songs: 1. We’ve Come This Far By Faith, 2. I Will Trust In The Lord, 3. You Brought Me From A Mighty Long Way (sound starts at 0:12). Have students identify 3-5 of the forms of call and response they learned in Step 3 by noting in the chart which form they heard, along with the timestamp range when it started and stopped. Replay the video. Have students type into the chat the next call/response type and timestamp; let them correct their own timestamps.

See [Addendum](#) for Unit 2 and Unit 3 Extended Activities.

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Resources

Liseli A. Fitzpatrick, B.A., [African Names and Naming Practices: The Impact Slavery and European Domination had on the African Psyche, Identity and Protest](#), Dissertation, The Ohio State University, 2012, p. 53-54.

Sheila S. Walker, "[What's in a Name? Black awareness Keeps the African tradition of 'meaningful names' alive](#)," Ebony Volume 32 (8), June 1977, p. 75.

[Honorific nicknames in popular music](#), Wikipedia

[Franklin biography](#)

[Hudson biography](#)

Good Morning America, [Jennifer Hudson Interview](#), May 18, 2021

[Unit 2 - Activity 2 Key and Chart](#)

[West Angeles COGIC](#)

Key Terms

Communalism denotes awareness of the interdependence of people. One acts in accordance with the notion that the duty to one's family and social group is more important than individual privileges and rights. Communalism is built on healthy relationships. We need healthy relationships.

Orality and verbal expressiveness refer to the special importance attached to knowledge that is passed on through word of mouth and the cultivation of oral virtuosity. Words are powerful!

Call & Response can be thought of as a musical conversation between multiple participants. The caller or leader acts as a guide for the musicians, starting the song and facilitating its development. The caller sets the tone throughout the performance, pushing and pulling on the energy of the participants. The responders follow the leader, sometimes with set prearranged lyrics. This form allows for maximum participation, emphasizing inclusivity and community.

Personal style and uniqueness refer to the cultivation of a unique or distinctive personality or essence and putting one's own brand on an activity — a concern with style more than being technically correct or efficient. It implies approaching life as if it were an artistic endeavor.

COGIC (pronounced Co'-jick) is an acronym for Church of God in Christ, the largest Pentecostal denomination in the US, and with a predominantly African-American membership.

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