Edward Kennedy Ellington was born in Washington, D.C. His parents insisted that he take piano lessons as a young boy. At first he was not interested. But soon he learned to love the sounds he could make. His piano teacher, however, did not. The boy was not interested in learning to play the piano properly. He only wanted to make unusual sounds, which were only noises, as far as the piano teacher was concerned. He was seven when the teacher refused to try to give him any more lessons. But the boy loved the piano. So he learned to play on his own. He used the family player piano as a teacher. He imitated the notes of piano-roll tunes.

At Armstrong High School, the kids nicknamed him Duke, because of his fine manners. He still played around with his music. But he needed training. He finally got up the courage to ask the music teacher, Henry Grant, if he could take some lessons. Duke had talent and the desire to learn. So Grant agreed to help.

About this time, Duke decided he should do something toward supporting himself. His father held two jobs. The least Duke could do was hold down one. He got a job as a soda jerk. The job inspired Duke's first attempt at songwriting. He called the song "Soda Fountain Rag." He composed it in 1915 at the age of 16. It was hard to put his musical ideas down on paper, because he still could not read or write music. Grant soon helped Duke with that.

Duke also had talent in art. He was especially good with watercolors. The art teacher got him to enter one of his paintings in a contest. Both the teacher and Duke were excited about the chance of winning. The contest was sponsored by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. As hoped, Duke won the contest. He was awarded an art scholarship by Pratt Institute in Brooklyn.
But Duke had a problem. He knew he had art talent. He knew that the scholarship would be a big help to his parents. The family had very little money. Going to college without the aid of a scholarship would be almost impossible for Duke with his sister, Ruth, still at home. Yet Duke wasn't sure he wanted to spend his whole life in the art field. It would be a long time—if ever—before he could earn a living in art, unless he became an art teacher. He didn't want to be a teacher. So, after careful thought, he turned down the scholarship.

When Duke was a senior, he quit high school. He found jobs painting signs during the day and playing music at night. He got together a group who called themselves Duke's Serenaders.

In 1918, Ellington married Edna Thompson. In 1919, their son Mercer was born. The marriage did not last, however. Ellington had put his interest and effort into his music and his band. He became well known as a bandleader and composer. Before long, people began to ask for his special sound to be played at all kinds of programs.

Ellington wrote many songs that are thought to be some of the best music composed in America. "Mood Indigo," "Solitude," and "Sophisticated Lady" are a few of his finest. He also wrote music for Broadway shows and the movies.

One of his closest friends, Billy Strayhorn, played a very important role in preserving Ellington's music. He helped Ellington write down songs after they had been played in front of audiences. In spite of this effort, many of the songs have been lost because they were never written down. They were simply memorized to be played in a performance.

Ellington is remembered as one of the greatest jazz musicians of all time.
Duke Ellington

1. ___ D ___ ___ ___
2. ___ U ___
3. ___ ___ ___ K
4. ___ ___ ___ E ___ ___ ___ ___
5. ___ ___ E ___ ___ ___
6. ___ ___ ___ L ___ ___ ___ ___
7. ___ L ___ ___ ___
8. ___ I ___ ___ ___
9. ___ ___ ___ N ___ ___ ___
10. ___ ___ ___ G ___ ___ ___
11. ___ ___ ___ T ___ ___ ___ ___
12. ___ ___ ___ ___ O ___ ___ ___ ___
13. ___ ___ ___ N ___ ___ ___ ___

1. Duke’s real first name.
3. Duke worked as a ___ ___ at one time.
4. Duke was especially good when painting with ___.
5. Ellington’s son.
6. Duke was awarded an art ___.
7. Duke used a ___ piano as a teacher.
8. His parents insisted he take ___ lessons.
9. One of Ellington’s most famous songs.
10. Henry ___ was Duke’s music teacher.
11. Billy ___ was Ellington’s writing partner.
13. Ellington had a band called Duke’s ___.

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