

Grades
6 - 12



FIVE GUYS NAMED MOE STUDENT GUIDE



HE WAS A-ROCKIN’

“ Dressed up like a circus clown with his tenor sax in hand, say he’s maestro of the band... ”

— “PUSH KA PI SHEE PIE”



“King of the Juke Box” or Louis Jordan—no matter what you call him, this entertainer is synonymous with rollicking rhythms and roof-raising good times. Louis Jordan was a saxophonist who played in big swing orchestras before forming his own group, the Tympany Five. As a bandleader, his songwriting and performing talents blossomed, and Jordan went on to craft hot tunes that took listeners in the 1930s and 40s by storm. “Jazz men play mostly for themselves,” Jordan remarked. “I play for the people.” Louis and his Tympany Five were groundbreaking in an era of big bands. Their small band size of six produced a new quality of sound, and Jordan’s larger than life personality captivated audiences.

Jordan’s performance style provided the blueprint for rock n’ roll and all that has

come after, impacting the next generation of early rockers who often covered his material. Jordan’s influence extended beyond his lifetime and can still be heard in popular music today. As B.B. King once explained, “What [Louis] was doing became the origins of rap. He was rhyming things that nobody else was able to do.” Jordan’s song “Beware” has been called the earliest rap song.

Perhaps Louis Jordan’s most lasting legacy is his unabashed celebration of good music and good times. In the spirit of today’s YOLO (You Only Live Once) culture, Jordan once famously sang, “I don’t care if you’re young or old. Get together, let the good times roll.”

TO DO:

In small groups, explore one of the areas listed below that Louis Jordan helped innovate and inspire in today’s music.

- Music Videos
- Band Sizes and Band Sound
- On Stage Personas and Performances
- Song writing and Style

Share what you have learned with the rest of your class and have a discussion about Louis Jordan’s legacy in modern music.

▲ *A still of Louis Jordan and the Tympany Five performing “Caledonia.”*

WIRED TO MOVE

“ You start snapping your fingers and shouting out loud... ”
— “MESSY BESSY”

How did Louis Jordan become anointed “The King of the Jukebox?” Funny lyrics? Catchy tunes? An innate understanding of human biology?

It turns out that we may actually be wired to “love to hear the rhythm of the clicketty clack” in the beats of hit songs like Jordan’s “Choo Choo Ch’Boogie.”

Scientists in Denmark recently looked into why dance songs get us up on our feet. They discovered that there is a type of rhythmic formula that makes it so we can’t help but want to ch’boogie on the dance floor (or in our seat in the Allen Theatre).

The scientists honed in on the important role that **syncopation** plays in getting us to dance—syncopation leads to “gaps in the rhythmic structure and underlying beat of the music that we can physically inhabit with our own bodies.” They also found that “rhythmic patterns that had a sort of a balance between predictability and

complexity” lead to the strongest desire to dance. Music with “medium” amounts of syncopation give us a steady beat but also leave enough “inviting gaps” to give us opportunity to spin some moves.

Louis Jordan certainly knew this magic formula. You may just find yourself onstage shaking your tail feather with our *Five Guys Named Moe*. It’s only natural!

▼ *The five Moes of Five Guys Named Moe. Photo by Tony Powell, courtesy of Arena Stage.*



TO DO:

Listen to at least three different types of music and discover what type of movement they inspire in you! How does a waltz by Tchaikovsky inspire you to move versus a song by Louis Jordan or Katy Perry? With a group of classmates, come up with a short dance/movement piece that showcases the different movements that each song inspired!

ALL THE BOYS ON THE BLOCK

“Who’s the greatest band around/ Makes the cats jump up and down/ Who’s the talk of rhythm town/ Five Guys Named Moe. That’s us!”

– “FIVE GUYS NAMED MOE”

In *Five Guys Named Moe*, it is a boy band—a group of young male vocalists—that is called on to save NoMax’s day with catchy music and lyrical lessons on relationships. To create the band, director Robert O’Hara went on a nationwide search, not unlike the ones many music producers have conducted to create chart-topping bands. And what he got is five triple threat performers who will wow you with their slick looks, smooth moves and sensational harmonies!

Boy bands have been capturing the hearts of audiences worldwide long before our Five Guys gathered for their first rehearsal. Here’s a look at some of the major moments in boy band history:

1966

A made-for-T.V. Beatles-inspired band, The Monkees are considered by many to be the very first “boy band.” Each band member has a distinct look and personality, a trope continued by subsequent boy bands.

1970

The Jackson Five get four Number One singles, the first band of any genre to do so. This family act of brothers broke barriers left and right while bringing motown music to the mainstream. It also produces pop sensation Michael Jackson.



▲ The Jackson 5 (top) & The Monkees (bottom)

1994

An R&B group made up of young African-American men, Boyz II Men models their vocal style on a barbershop quartet. Their collaboration with Mariah Carey on the song “One Sweet Day” holds a record with 16 weeks on the top 100 chart.



2000

Boy band fever hits a high when NSYNC releases its new album *No Strings Attached* and sells over one million copies in a single day.

2008

After a slump in popularity, boy bands come back on the scene by going back to the genre’s roots. The Jonas Brothers, a family act of three brothers, skyrocket to fame through their partnership with the Disney Channel. The young heartthrobs make cameos on the network’s T.V. shows and star in original made-for-T.V. films like *Camp Rock*.

TO DO:

Now it’s your turn to step into the producer’s chair and create your own boy band in a few easy steps!

1. Pick a musical style that you like.
2. Imagine you are making a band to play this type of music. Write down the instruments and skills that different members of this band would need.
3. Sketch out what your band members would look like—their clothing, hairstyles, etc. Think about how they would dance/move to the music.
4. Create a band name for your new group and share it with your class!

2015

Boy bands are back and as strong as ever. One has to only look at the hordes of screaming teenage and preteen girls at concerts of bands like One Direction and The Wanted to know they aren’t going anywhere!

THE BIG EVENT

“

Don't care if you're young or old/ Let the good times roll. ”

– “LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL”

In this inside interview, director Robert O'Hara discusses his vision for *Five Guys Named Moe*. An accomplished director and playwright, O'Hara received the 2010 NAACP Best Director Award for his direction of *Eclipsed*, the 2010 Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding New Play for *Antebellum* and an OBIE Award for his direction of the world premiere of the critically acclaimed *In the Continuum*.

Tell us about *Five Guys Named Moe*. What attracts you to this show?

I'm known as the new play guy. But I love musicals, absolutely adore them. What attracts me to *Five Guys Named Moe*, besides the music, is the opportunity to reinvent it. Louis Jordan's music is the root for rock and roll and hip-hop. He was really a nightclub act in a way. He was popular entertainment. People would come and dance to his music. So when [I was asked] to put my own take on it, I immediately thought about what context I could put the play in.

We're going to add different types of instruments and put a different spin, so it doesn't feel like we're in the 1930s and 40s listening to a band. We're going to make it an event — a Five Moe's event — and a celebration of Louis Jordan's music.



▲ Robert O'Hara

How would you describe the aesthetic of the show?

It's going to be incredibly stylish. We're really looking for it to be almost a nightclub act. I want the cast to feel like rock stars and I want to encourage them to be rock stars.

Every number is going to be choreographed. It's going to be a huge dance show. Which is why it required us to really search for the people who have that sort of stamina and skill set. There's going to be flips. There's going to be tapping, and there's going to be throwing people around the stage. I want it to be an event in that way. We're mixing in modern dance with dances from the period, which is so great to see.

When you're directing, what do you look for in a writer (and vice versa when you're a playwright, what do you look for in a director)?

As a director, it has to be something that's going to keep me interested for four weeks in rehearsal. Is there a question that I can ask about the script or a challenge that has been laid down by the playwright to wrestle with? Because if there's not something to wrestle with, then you're just on autopilot. So I look for something that brings a question. And part of the question of *Five Guys Named Moe* is, "Is this music relevant now?"

As a playwright, I'm looking for a director who can do something with the script that I couldn't do that can create on top of the script, just as I want the actors to take the script and make it their own and create something new. I look for someone with a strong dramaturgical sense and a strong visual style. That's always exciting to see those people.

TO DO:

One of the biggest elements of Robert O'Hara's directorship of *Five Guys Named Moe* is his transformation of the show for modern audiences. Just like Robert O'Hara, you too can reimagine a play or other kind of story.

Start with your favorite play, novel or short story and reread it. Now, try changing the setting it takes place in. How would the new location change the story? Try placing the story in a different time period—is that possible? How does it change things? After reimagining this story in different ways, pick the one you like best and write a brief portion of it. Share with friends and classmates!



FIVE GUYS NAMED MOE STUDENT GUIDE



WRITTEN BY

*Maddie Gaw, Emily Goodridge,
Rachel Lerner-Ley and Linda Lombardi*

EDITED BY

*Emily Goodridge, Rachel Lerner-Ley,
Lianna Salva and Laura Winkelmann*

SPONSORED BY



The Laub Foundation

IMPACT
CREATIVITY

