



Louis Armstrong

HIDDEN HERO OF HISTORY

Listen to the story: <https://jonincharacter.com/louis-armstrong/>

Louis Armstrong was born in New Orleans in 1901. He lived in what was once a very dangerous neighborhood and had a very difficult childhood. In fact, he needed to start working when he was still pretty young. That is how he came to afford his very first **cornet**.

Louis Armstrong was eventually mentored by the top cornetist in New Orleans: Joe “King” Oliver, or King Oliver for short. Over time, Mr. Armstrong became one of the most in-demand cornetists in town. He kicked-off his career on Mississippi river boats and in 1922, King Oliver asked him to join his orchestra in Chicago.

In 1925, after playing and recording with King Oliver and then spending a brief, and unenjoyable, time playing in New York, he decided that he would go back to Chicago and start making records under his own name for the very first time.

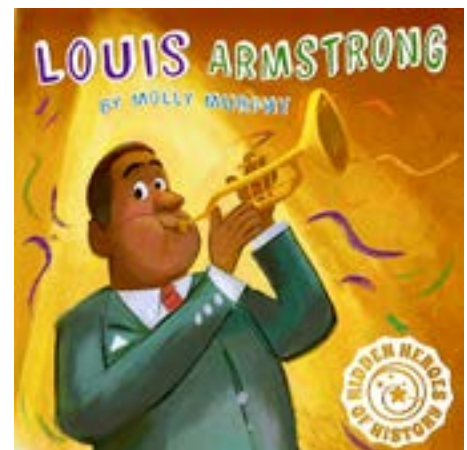
Mr. Armstrong struck out on his own and became one of the most influential jazz musicians of all time.

Over his long and storied career, he transformed jazz music. He really developed the art form in a way that still influences jazz musicians to this day, and has made sure of its lasting legacy! He also had a distinctive voice, was skilled at playing with melodies and improvising. And he helped popularize ‘**scat singing**,’ an improvised form of singing like your voice is an instrument.

Louis Armstrong and his band ‘the Hot Five’ - later the ‘Hot Seven’ - recorded hit songs for five decades. He wrote two autobiographies, ten magazine articles, hundreds of pages of a memoir, thousands of letters, and at the height of his career he was performing almost 300 concerts a year, with tours all over the world! He became known as “Ambassador Satch.”

Mr. Armstrong broke down barriers during a time when there were even more significant obstacles for African American people in our country than there are today. He was the first African American person to write an autobiography, get cast in a major motion picture, and host a nationally sponsored radio show. He also famously spoke out about the **Little Rock Nine**. This was an incident in Arkansas where nine African American students were prevented from attending school.

He really liked his home in the working-class neighborhood of Corona, Queens, where he lived with his wife Lucille for almost 30 years. And he had a great love for his surrounding community - a love that was given





right back to him. When he recorded his cover of “What A Wonderful World”, which is still one of his most popular recordings, he said: “There’s so much in ‘Wonderful World’ that brings me back to my neighborhood where I live in Corona, New York.”

He saw three generations of kids grow up there and come back to visit with their own children. And when he thought of their faces, it gave extra meaning to the part of “What a Wonderful World” where he sings: “I hear babies cry/ I watch them grow/ they’ll learn much more than I’ll ever know.”

It seemed so much of his life was about a deep passion for music and using it to bring people together. Louis Armstrong built a music legacy and a legacy beyond music.

Glossary

Cornet - A melodic brass instrument, very similar to the trumpet.

Scat Singing - An improvised form of singing like your voice is an instrument.

Visit the Louis Armstrong Family Museum

Go to the museum website for photos of Louis performing on stage and relaxing at home. Discover more about his legendary life, his films and books. Best of all, listen to a sample of some of Satchmo’s most-loved tunes.

Website: <https://www.louisarmstronghouse.org/>

Give it Some Thought

Can you come up with some reasons why you think Mr. Armstrong is such an important role model?

Why was it important for him to speak out like he did when he saw racial injustice?

When Mr. Armstrong chose to live in the neighborhood he lived in before he was famous, what do you think it says about his character? What was more important to him: fame and fortune or family and community?

Mr. Armstrong’s most famous song, “What a Wonderful World,” was a song of hope and truly represented how he felt about the world he lived in and loved. What is your favorite song and what does it say about you and how you feel right now?

Use Your Imagination

If you traveled the world like Louis Armstrong did, what kind of Ambassador would you like to be: An Ambassador of Change, Ambassador of Kindness, an Ambassador of Acceptance for All or (choose your own cause)? People called Mr. Armstrong “Ambassador Satch” – what would your ambassador name be? Pretend that you have been asked to give a speech about what you represent – where will you be giving the speech? Who will be in the audience? What are you going to say?