

# Trombone Shorty Shows Us How To Learn From The Past, Excel In The Present And "Play It Forward" In Music And In Life

*This lesson can be presented over 1-2 sessions. Instructors should feel free to use whichever discussion questions and activities you think best for your class or group. We advise giving students the sheet with the definitions of the virtues before the discussion questions.*

### Lesson Goals

Help students...

- see how living with passion and perseverance in pursuit of a goal can lead to personal success and the ability to help others
- consider their own sense of duty to help others and to live in solidarity with others throughout their lives
- see the importance of family support in helping each member of our family to strive for our goals and to feel loved and affirmed
- attain a deeper appreciation for knowing our history in helping us to better understand the forces that have formed who we are today as individuals and as a community
- become inspired through knowledge of our history and past struggles and achievements to engage the challenges of the present, and to work toward excellence
- see how a deeper understanding of our historical failures and success can inform our path forward

### Highlighted Virtues / Character Traits

**Creativity** - the ability to think of new ideas; to come up with new approaches for accomplishing a goal or solving a problem

**Duty** - something that one is expected or required to do according to one's own standards or values, and the standards and values of groups that we are a part of such as our family, school and larger community

**Family Dedication / Support** - complete dedication for the well-being of other members of our family, physically, emotionally and spiritually, motivated by love

**Generosity** – giving freely of our own time, possessions and / or talent

**Grit** - living with passion and perseverance over the long term in pursuit of a goal

**Perseverance** - trying hard and continuously in spite of obstacles and difficulties

**Solidarity** - unity from a shared common purpose and / or interest; active loyalty within a group; mutual support within a group

**Wisdom** - ability to apply knowledge, understanding and experience in ways that are effective and good. The ability to discern or judge what is true, right, or lasting

### Leader Introduction:

Today we're going to learn about a musician who goes by the unique name of Trombone Shorty. Trombone Shorty grew up as Troy Andrews in a neighborhood of New Orleans that was poor in material things but wealthy in music and tradition. Trombone Shorty is now a world-famous musician who has won a Grammy award, played with Usher, the Foo Fighters and was even invited to the White House to play for President Obama. We're going to learn about Troy Andrews' life from a couple of videos that bring us into his childhood, the history of jazz, show us his amazing success today and how Andrews is giving back to his community. During Black History Month it's especially good for us to see why history has been so important to Troy Adams and how this can be a model for our lives.

### Lesson Videos:

WWOZ Interview (please play until 7:00)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZRYUhh0y4tA>

Leader Transition: Now let's see a little more on the impact the older musicians had on Trombone Shorty, and also how Trombone Shorty is now giving back to his community.

PBS Interview (Please start at 2:00 and play until the end)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJ4gseA2kko>

Additional videos your class or group may be interested in are presented on page 5.

### Leader Summary:

Trombone Shorty's life shows us why it's important to know our history, how our history can be a foundation and source of inspiration to strive for excellence today, and how learning from our history can help us to better move forward in our own unique way.

### Discussion Question Options: *(discussion prompts / answers are in parentheses)*

Before beginning our discussion, let's read over the virtues and their definitions, found in the online lesson as a separate document.

1. Troy Andrews loves his family and the neighborhood he grew up in. What are some of the key things he speaks about and that we saw in the videos that made his neighborhood and childhood so special?  
(music was everywhere and a joyful part of his community's daily life; Andrew's older brother and many other musicians encouraged him to play and helped him to have a passion for music; the older musicians took the time to play with the kids in the neighborhood, taught them and challenged them to be able to play the music they played; Andrews also spoke about how the older musicians cared about the kids in their community.)
2. This wasn't covered in the videos, but Trombone Shorty wasn't able to play a real instrument until he found a used, broken trombone in the garbage, and then played it every day and night so that he could be good enough to play in his older brother's band. At the age of 10 Trombone Shorty and his friends were so good they formed their own band. What virtues does this part of Trombone Shorty's life reflect?  
(**grit** in living with passion and **perseverance** in pursuit of his goals of becoming a great musician and leading his own band)

3. In the interview, Trombone Shorty said “Older musicians always wanted to make sure I understood where everything started before I could be good at or understand where I needed to be later on in life so they told me to respect the music that came before and make sure I pay attention.”

Do you agree with this that Trombone Shorty would become a better jazz performer if he understood its history, why or why not? And do you think it made a difference that he was able to learn the history of jazz from older musicians that he looked up to?  
(Learning the history of jazz likely helped him to better understand it, and learning about it from people he admired likely inspired him to want to practice and excel in playing it.)

4. Trombone Shorty’s life is very focused on music but let’s talk about whether Trombone Shorty’s desire to understand the past to help him be better now, and to understand where he needs to go in the future speaks to life as a whole.

How does knowing our history help us to better understand who we are today as an individual, as a family and as a larger community and nation?  
(Knowing our history gives us an understanding of the events and forces that have formed our family, and have formed us as an individual member of our family. The same is true for our community and nation.)

How can knowing our history inspire us to become better today?  
(Knowing the struggles and accomplishments of the past can inspire us to engage our struggles and challenges with a sense of determination that we can improve as an individual, as a family, as a community and nation.)

How does understanding our history help us to define a better path forward?  
(By learning what has succeeded and failed in our past, we can more wisely chart out our own course for the future for ourselves, for our families and for our community.)

5. What do you think are some of the events and movements in our nation’s history that can inspire us to take on the challenges of today?  
(abolitionist movement to end slavery; civil rights movement to address discrimination against blacks and in more recent years against other minorities; the suffrage movement in securing the right for women to vote; sending a man to the moon)
6. What do you think are some of the events and movements in our nation’s history that can inspire us to take on the challenges of today?  
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7. Trombone Shorty took the older musicians advice and formed his own style and sound, mixing rock with funk and soul and a little bit of jazz to create his own unique style and sound? What does he call his new style of music? (supafunkrock)

What virtue has Trombone Shorty lived out in mixing jazz with other types of music and creating his own sound? (creativity)

8. Trombone Shorty said of the older musicians he grew up with, “the most important thing they drilled in my head was to be open minded and learn all kinds of music.” Again, do you think that approach to music is a good way to approach our lives, and if yes, why? (We don’t have all the answers on our own and we can learn a lot from others. By learning different perspectives and beliefs, we have a better chance of finding the truth and what may work best for our lives.)
9. The New Orleans music community has a tradition of “Playing it Forward”. One way to do this is to be **generous** in sharing our gifts and living in **solidarity** with future generations. How is Trombone Shorty living with generosity and solidarity in his life? (He built a foundation to help children in New Orleans become exceptional musicians by enabling them to play with, and to be taught by accomplished musicians and mentors.)

How important do you think it is to be mentored in having someone walk a journey with us and to teach us?

(mentors can help bring an endeavor like music, sports and academics to life by teaching us through their own life story; can inspire us by making an endeavor more personal and relevant for us; can inspire us to work and persevere towards a goal simply by showing us they care about us and our success as a person)

Do you think you would want to be a mentor for others when you get older?

### Journal Writing Options

1. Trombone Shorty loves his family and the community he grew up in. Write about some of the things that you like about your family and / or one of your communities. For a community it doesn’t just need to be your neighborhood, it can be a sports team, group of friends, a club or your school.
2. Write a short essay on a person or movement from history who is inspiring to you and why? Include a description of what they did, their goals and what lessons from their life or movement you want to live out.

### Extended Activity:

Organize students into teams and ask each team to make a presentation to your group on a historical event, person or movement related to black history that has formed in a significant way who we are today. Some examples are the abolitionist movement to end slavery; civil rights movement; impact of the march on Selma, Dr. Martin Luther King, and many other black leaders lesser known but still important. Each team should present on:

- goals of the movement, endeavor or individual
- strategies employed to achieve the goals
- risks and costs borne by those who were part of the movement or endeavor
- results of the movement or endeavor and how it has formed who we are today as a nation and for us as individuals
- future goals that a movement may still have left to achieve

**Additional Videos** your class or group may have an interest in seeing:

Reading of Trombone Shorty's autobiography (9:15)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QitquEL48Co>

Trombone Short playing at the White House for President Obama (3:40)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZwsOrEc3bA>

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