

# Jazz Greats: John Coltrane



**John Coltrane** was born in 1926 in Hamlet, North Carolina. Inspired by his father, who played many different instruments, young John began studying the E-flat horn and clarinet. As a teen, influenced by musicians such as Lester Young, John switched to the alto saxophone, the instrument he would become famous for playing.

John served in the military during World War II, and he made his first recordings during that time. After the war, he joined the band led by jazz and blues great Eddie Vinson, which exposed him to new ways of playing the saxophone. In 1960, Coltrane recorded the album *Giant Steps*, made up of his own compositions. In the same year, he formed his first quartet. Their first recording together was also his debut playing soprano saxophone.

As his style developed and changed, Coltrane began to receive criticism from some audiences and jazz critics. Coltrane and Eric Dolphy, the second horn player in his quartet at the time, were harshly criticized as “Anti-Jazz” for their unusual sound. Perhaps because of this, Coltrane played more conservatively in his studio recordings of 1962 and 1963. In 1965, however, with the formation of his second quartet, his playing took on a more harmonious sound. He played with this band, which included his wife, Alice, on piano, until his death in 1967.

Coltrane continued to win awards even after death. Among others, he was awarded a Grammy for “Best Jazz Solo Performance” in 1982, and a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 1997.

**Directions:** Answer the questions below. Use text evidence to support your answers.

## Answer Sheet - Sample Answers

1. What is the main idea of Jazz Greats: John Coltrane? Write it in your own words.

John Coltrane is a well-known saxophone player and award-winning musician who was influential in creating a new jazz sound during his career.



Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Choose a quote from the text that supports the following statement, and record it on the lines below.

John Coltrane was an award-winning musician.

“Among others, he was awarded a Grammy for “Best Jazz Solo Performance” in 1982, and a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 1997.”

3. What can you infer about the fact that Coltrane continued to win awards even after he died?

Answers will vary, but may include: I can infer that John Coltrane was an extremely influential musician in the jazz community if he was continuing to win awards after he died. I can also infer that he left a lasting impact on music.

4. Describe what the author means when the text says, “...Coltrane began to receive criticism from some audience and jazz critics.”

The author means that many people did not like Coltrane’s music style as he changed and developed it.

5. How did playing in the band led by Eddie Vinson benefit John Coltrane?

Playing in the band led by Eddie Vinson was beneficial for John Coltrane because he was exposed to new ways of playing the saxophone. This helped him develop as a musician.

6. What did John Coltrane do after serving in the military during World War II?

After serving in the military during World War II, John Coltrane joined a band and focused on his music career.

7. Who or what influenced John Coltrane as a musician? Include two pieces of evidence from the passage.

- a. His father played many different instruments and inspired John to begin studying different instruments, too.
- b. He was influenced by Lester Young, which helped him decide to switch to the alto saxophone.