

B.B. KING MUSEUM AND DELTA INTERPRETIVE CENTER

Curriculum Lesson Plans, Grades 4 – 5

The King of the Blues

Content Area(s):

Language Arts
Social Studies
Music - Blues

Related Themes:

Careers
Biography
Migration
American Music

Overview of the lesson:

Students will meet B.B. King through stories and his music. They will discuss and reflect on the life experiences that helped make him the man that he is today.

Proposed Time Frame: Two 50-minute class periods or more.

Materials:

Biography of B.B. King
Time Line of B.B. King
Photos from various times
KWL Chart
Meet Lucille Handout

Equipment:

Internet connection and video projector; videos; computer speakers

Curriculum Resources:

- *The Arrival of B.B. King*, an authorized biography by Charles Sawyer, 1980

BIG IDEA: Most people who become famous work very hard at something they love or care about. Their life experiences can be building blocks toward their success.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Students will...

1. Get to know the musician, Riley B. King, through facts, stories, photos, emotions and music.
2. Write about how decisions and their consequences affect our lives.
3. Analyze factors that allowed B.B. King to become a world class artist and celebrated performer.

Food for thought:

“...The trajectory of B.B. King’s life that runs through time, space and history from that sharecropper’s cabin in Berclair to the Capitol in Jackson* and beyond, has a breathtaking majesty. It’s important to step back and contemplate the arc of that curve, because the way stations in his life between those two points are benchmarks in the history of our culture and society. In many ways, the story of Riley B. King, known to the world as the King of the Blues, B.B. King, is the story of America from the first quarter-mark of the twentieth century into the first decade of the twenty-first century.” *In February 2005, the Mississippi Legislature and Governor presented a proclamation to B.B. King on B.B. King Day in Jackson, MS.

PROCEDURES

- Prior to teaching the lesson, read through a short **biography** of B.B. King and select some **photos** to view. Preview two short videos; one about his life and one about Lucille (see links in appendix). Preview the video of the song, “One Shoe blues.”
- Make copies of a **KWL chart** and the **Meet Lucille** worksheet.
- Reflect on “Food for Thought” quote. B.B. King’s life has spanned important periods of American History: mechanized farming, the Great Migration, installation of electricity in rural areas, inventions of radio and the phonograph, the Great Depression, the Civil Rights Era, building of the Interstate Highway system, growth of American music, advent of computers, the expansion of technology, etc.

- *B.B. King Treasures* (with CD) by B.B. King and Dick Waterman, 2005
- B.B. King Museum and Interpretive Center, <http://www.bbkingmuseum.org>
- B.B. King official website www.bbking.com
- Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, <http://rockhall.com>
- Mississippi Blues Trail, information and maps; videos and curriculum guide <http://msbluestrail.org>

Vocabulary:

- Album
- Blues
- Cut a record
- Gold album
- Gospel music
- Hit
- Platinum album
- Pop chart
- R&B (Rhythm & Blues)
- Sharecropper
- Single
- Top Forty

Lesson Extensions:

- Visit the B.B. King Museum and Delta Interpretive Center
- Research life stories of a different famous person
- Listen to examples of blues music by other performers
- View YouTube or GuitarTube videos of selected performances by B.B. King.
- Use a Mississippi map to look up locations where B.B. spent time as a child or young man: Berclair, Lexington, Kilmichael, Indianola, Memphis

- Introduce the lesson title to students, and ask who they would name as “King of the Blues.” Follow up with a question, “What do we mean when we talk about *the blues*?” Can you think of someone who sings the blues?
- View the video, *One Shoe Blues*, starring B.B. King and sock puppets, created by children’s book author, Sandra Boynton. Introduce the song as an example of a blues song which is also a book by the same title. After watching the video, ask students to state what the problem was that led to writing/singing a blues song.
- Ask students to describe what B. B. King did in the video; describe the music he played and sang; what else was going on in the video?
- Give students a copy of the KWL chart and ask them to fill out the K and W portions about “The King of the Blues.” Collect, read and keep this work for reference and later use.
- Introduce the students to B.B. King by sharing a few facts and photos from his life. Currently in his 80s, he is still working, giving numerous concerts every year. Each year in July, he returns to Mississippi for a “Homecoming” concert in Indianola, the location of the B.B. King Museum and Delta Interpretive Center. His title, King of the Blues is not just a play on words. His recordings have sold millions, he has at least fourteen Grammy awards, and countless other awards and honors.
- Ask the students if they have heard B.B. King’s music, or if they have attended the annual Homecoming event held each year in Indianola. Ask any who responded to say more about their exposure to B.B. King.
- Introduce the early life of B.B. King through the video, “**A Moment with the King**,” where B.B. talks about a childhood experience with hunger. Mention that in his childhood he experienced loss of loved ones, hardship, and fear. After watching the video, ask the students what questions they have about what they saw.
- Divide the class into small groups of three or four students. Ask the groups to discuss one of the topics: hardship, loss or fear, sharing their personal experiences. After this small group discussion, ask one or two students to share with the large group.
- When B.B. King was nine years old, his mother, Nora Ella, realized she was dying. She told her son, “that he was a good boy, that he should try to do good, and he should be kind to others, because the kindness would always come back to him.” Her message has been a guidepost for him all of his life. After her death, his life was filled with work, school and church, where he was first exposed to the guitar by Reverend Archie Fair.
- B.B. King was about thirteen or fourteen years old when he started playing guitar. He began by learning three chords used in gospel music. Pretty soon, he began playing in church. His Aunt Mima owned a record player, and introduced him to recordings of blues performers. He heard live blues music when his cousin, Bukka White came to visit. These early experiences with music influenced decisions he made as a young adult.
- One of King’s first music jobs was playing at the 16th Street Grill in West Memphis in 1947, when he was about twenty-two years old. He got the

Standards and Competencies

Common Core State Standards

ELA Grades 4 & 5 – Writing

4.3, 5.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences. d. Use concrete words and phrases and sensory details to convey experiences and events precisely.

ELA Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration

4.1, 5.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

d. Review the key ideas expressed and explain their own ideas and understanding in light of the discussion.

Social Studies Framework Grade 4:

Culture 6. Understand diversity in Mississippi.
b. Identify the Mississippi artists, musicians and writers who have an impact on the state, nation and world.

Visual and Performing Arts Framework: Music, Grade 4
6. Recognize that music reflects the culture, time, and place of its origin. (HC)

job while he was working at a radio station. It was sometime later that he named his guitar Lucille. Show the video, *How Lucille Got Her Name*.

- Review the details of the story after showing the video.
- Introduce the Meet Lucille worksheet. Students may wish to conduct research about acoustic and electric guitars and present or display what they learned.
- Based on information gleaned from the first two sections of the KWL chart, introduce new material or clarify information; decide how to address any topics listed in the “want to know” section.
- Ask the students to write a story about their lives, giving details about events or experiences they feel are significant. Some things to include would be loss, gain, hardship, good times, skills acquired, personal accomplishments, milestones, etc. Close the lesson with a discussion about how early life experiences can shape what we become as adults.

Note: There are two more lessons for grades 4 – 5 in the curriculum. If you choose to stop here, ask students to complete the “L” of their KWL charts, stating what they have learned from studying the life story of The King of the Blues, B.B. King.

ASSESSMENT(S)

1. KWL chart: Use student responses to refine, revise, or expand plans for the lesson(s).
2. Small group discussion: Listen to small group discussions to assess how well students address their assigned topic.
3. Writing assignment: Read through the students' personal stories; decide how to grade them.

LESSON RESOURCES

1. Video: *One Shoe Blues*, 4:56
<http://www.guitar-tube.com/watch/bb-king-sock-puppets>
2. Article: Brief Biography of B.B. King
<http://www.bbking.com/bio/>
3. Video: *A Moment with the King*, 2:54 – A video story about B.B. King's bicycle journey. The opening screen shows a lonely dirt road.
<http://www.bbkingmuseum.org/web-films>
4. Video: *How Lucille Got Her Name*, 1:04
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EGsvAMRFivo>
5. Mississippi Blues Trail and Markers – Story of King's early life.
<http://msblustrail.org/blues-trail-markers/b-b-king-birthplace>