

# B.B. KING MUSEUM CURRICULUM LESSON PLANS

## Curriculum Lesson Plans, Grades 4 – 5

### The Blues: A Feeling

**Content Area(s):**

Language Arts  
Social Studies/History  
Music – Blues

**Related Themes:**

African American History  
Song writing  
Poetry  
Entertainment  
Popular Culture  
American Music

**Overview of the lesson:**

Students will experience B.B. King’s music through listening, and by performing and writing their own blues lyrics.

**Proposed Time Frame:** Two 50-minute classes, or more.

**Materials:**

The Story of the Blues  
Lyrics of Rainy Day Blues  
Beginner Blues Handout

**Equipment:**

Internet connection and video projector for videos; computer speakers

**BIG IDEA:** Blues music is known for the way it expresses how a person feels. B.B. King uses his voice and his guitar, Lucille, to express the emotional mood of the song he is performing.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

Students will...

1. Learn about the blues as a feeling and as a type of music. Listen to samples of B.B. King’s blues music to determine how the song lyrics and the guitar solos express personal feelings.
2. Perform a rhythm accompaniment with a recorded blues song.
3. Create blues lyrics with the class, and then in small groups.

**LESSON BACKGROUND INFORMATION****Blues Definition, Oxford English Dictionary:**

Melancholic music of black American folk origin, typically in a twelve-bar sequence. It developed in the rural southern US toward the end of the 19th century, finding a wider audience in the 1940s as blacks migrated to the cities. This urban blues gave rise to rhythm and blues and rock and roll.

**Blues** is the name given to both a musical form and a music genre that originated in African-American communities of primarily the “Deep South” of the United States around the end of the 19th century from spirituals, work songs, field hollers, shouts and chants, and rhymed simple narrative ballads. The blues form, ubiquitous in jazz, rhythm and blues, and rock and roll is characterized by specific chord progressions, of which the twelve-bar blues chord progression is the most common.

– Wikipedia

**B.B. King’s Definition of the Blues:**

“The blues is an expression of anger against shame and humiliation.”

**Charles Sawyer**, biographer of B.B. King, wrote about performances of the famous bluesman in his book, *The Arrival of B.B. King*. “If B.B. was content to let his audience be strictly passive rather than active collaborators, he could never achieve the catharsis he aims for. He achieves the conversational mode...by convincing the audience that while he sings he is expressing his own travail in a personal plea for sympathy and understanding....He tells stories, pokes fun at himself, occasionally

### Curriculum Resources:

- *The Arrival of B.B. King*, an authorized biography by Charles Sawyer, 1980
- *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](http://www.bbking.com)
- Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, <http://rockhall.com>
- Blues Article: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blues>
- Mississippi Blues Trail, information and maps; videos and curriculum guide <http://msbluestrail.org>
- *Poetry for Young People: Langston Hughes*, Sterling, 2006

### Vocabulary:

- After Beat
- Blues
- Chorus
- Delta Blues
- Improvise
- Instrumental
- Introduction
- Lyrics
- Meter
- Urban Blues
- Verse

### Lesson Extensions:

- Visit the B.B. King Museum and Delta Interpretive Center
- Listen to examples of blues music by other blues performers (preview first)
- View visual art works by

plays the clown – all in an effort to draw the audience into the performance.”

### PROCEDURES

- Introduce the lesson by asking students what it means to have the blues. Take a few responses and ask for examples they might share with the class.
- Ask the students if they have heard of music called the blues. If there are students who indicate they have, ask them to say what they know. Based on these responses, ask if any know where blues music came from. Evaluate the responses to determine how much history to teach.
- Play the video “*The Letter B*” to introduce students to B.B. King singing an original blues song on Sesame Street. Ask some questions following the video, *i.e.*, What was the mood of this song? How were feelings communicated through the video?
- Play the history segment from *Blues Journey: An Exploration of the Blues*. This excerpt tells how the blues began and evolved, and includes sample sounds of early blues singers, the guitar and harmonica.
- Ask the students to think of circumstances that might give them the blues. Blues song lyrics often address themes of sadness, suffering, struggle or disappointment.
- Listen to a short portion of B.B. King singing a blues song (do not name the title). Play the example *Rainy Day Blues*. See lyrics in Resources. After a few lines of the chorus, stop the recording to ask what gave him the blues.
- Invite the students to play along with the recording of *Rainy Day Blues* by using “found sounds.” Suggestions: tapping a hand on a thigh; snapping fingers, tapping a pencil on a hard surface, rubbing two pieces of paper together, tapping a plastic ruler on a book, etc. Give students time to decide what kind of sound they will make; remind them that their task is to make music (not noise) to accompany the artist. Guide the performance by varying who plays at what time. Divide the class into groups and let one group play on the verse; another group play on the instrumental section, and all play on the chorus. Ask them to begin after the introduction, so that everyone can hear the beat they will play.
- Ask the class to decide what they might write about to create an original blues song. Explain that the text is built on a 4-beat pattern of twelve bars (measures) of music. Composing the text requires that the first line fits within sixteen beats, or 4 measures of 4 beats. When the lyrics are performed, the first line is sung and then repeated. The third or last line of text gives new information.
- When a topic is agreed upon, ask for ideas about the first line. Ask someone to write the line on the white board. Ask for ideas for the

Bennie Andrews, who documented African American life through his works

- View additional YouTube or GuitarTube videos of selected performances by B.B. King
- Listen to an excerpt from the audio book version of *Blues Journey* by Walter Dean Myers. The text is written in blues verse. (Lesson Resources #5)

### Standards and Competencies

#### ELA: Reading Literature; Craft and Structure

**RL.5.4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative language such as metaphors and similes.

#### ELA: Reading: Informational Text; Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

**RI.5.9** Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.

#### ELA: Speaking and Listening; Comprehension and Collaboration

**SL.5.1** 1. Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 5 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

#### Social Studies Framework Grade 4; Culture

6. Understand diversity in

third line, which usually rhymes. Decide if you want to continue to a second verse. There may be someone in the class who would like to create a tune for the lyrics the class created. Decide if that will work.

- Divide the class into groups of two or three students. Give them the handout, **Beginner Blues**. Each group will create a blues song of at least three verses that fit the 4-beat meter. Monitor the groups as they work.
- Based on your review of the student's work, invite one or two groups to read aloud the lyrics they created.
- Ask if anyone would like to improvise a blues tune to sing their lyrics. If there is a volunteer, remind students to be respectful of their classmate who is performing. Invite the class to accompany the singer by patting lightly on their legs on the after beat.
- Collect the groups' lyrics for use another day, or to assess them.
- Close the lesson by reminding students that while the blues were first sung during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the music of the blues continues to influence performers in today's music groups.

### ASSESSMENT

1. Evaluate student responses to discussion questions to determine their background knowledge and what additional information needs to be taught.
2. Analyze and give feedback to students about their ability to successfully accompany the recording of *Rainy Day Blues*, and their selection of sounds to accompany it.
3. Evaluate the student-created blues verses, giving feedback on the meter and the content.
4. Ask individual students to respond orally to what they have learned about the Blues, and how B.B. King has created his own style of singing and playing the Blues. If time allows, the students could respond in writing.

### LESSON RESOURCES

1. Music Video: *The Letter B*, on Sesame Street, 2:28 with muppets; guitar solo and verses. <http://www.bbking.com/videos/>
2. *Blues Journey*, Walter Dean Myers – Audiobook sample. The text is written in blues verse form. The sample includes blues guitar, reading of the text, sound effects, and blues harmonica. <http://www.amazon.com/Blues-Journey-Walter-Dean-Myers/dp/0823420795>

Mississippi.

b. Identify the Mississippi artists, musicians and writers who have an impact on the state, nation and world.

**Music Framework, Grade 5, Creating/Performing**

2. Compose and/or improvise short vocal and/or instrumental phrases in pentatonic and major scales, using simple meters, basic rhythm, and melodic patterns.

**Music Framework, Grade 5, Aesthetics**

7. Develop and use a vocabulary to describe the mood and feelings expressed in different music selections,

- a. Interpret feelings expressed by specific examples of music.
- b. Develop a musical idea or story that will express moods or feelings.

3. Audio Track: *Rainy Day Blues*, 30 seconds, Pandora sample.

<http://www.pandora.com/bb-king-childrens/big-blues-blues-music-for-kids/rainy-day-blues>

**Note:** If the *Rainy Day Blues* track is unavailable, substitute the video below for the performance of “found sounds” with the music.

4. Music Video: *Let the Good Times Roll*, 4:39, B.B. King performance at the North Sea Jazz Festival in 2009

<http://www.guitar-tube.com/watch/bbking-good-times-roll>

5. *Blues Journey: an Exploration of the Blues*, 6:23, is a history of the Blues prepared in four separate audio files. Each segment is 5 – 6 minutes’ duration.

<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/multimedia/series/AudioStories/blues-journey.aspx>

6. Sample Blues Lyrics resource handout. These may be used as a guide to assist students, if necessary, to develop their own original lyrics.