

# B.B. KING MUSEUM AND DELTA INTERPRETIVE CENTER

## Curriculum Lesson Plans Grades 9 – 12

### B.B. King – A Living Legend

**Content Area(s):**

English/Writing  
American History  
Mississippi Studies  
Career Education  
Music

**Related Themes:**

Careers  
Blues  
Biography  
Migration  
American Music  
Music Technology

**Overview of the lesson:**

Students will meet B.B. King through his life experiences and his music. They will consider factors that have made him a world famous blues musician.

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

**Materials:**

Biography of B.B. King  
B.B. King Timeline  
Photos from various times  
U.S. History Timeline  
Bio Poem Form

**Equipment:**

Internet connection and video projector; music examples; computer speakers

**Curriculum Resources:**

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

**BIG IDEA:** Studying the life of B.B. King can help us know about the man and his music, about the challenges and rewards of hard work, about America’s unique history and culture, and about ourselves.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

Students will...

1. Compare the life story of B.B. King to significant events in American history.
2. Express their understanding about how an individual’s growth and character is shaped by people whom we know, and by our life experiences.

**Food for thought:**

“B.B.’s fame is worldwide. The details of his life story are full of the history of our times, and that story has much to offer anyone interested in the American South, in the changing economics and sociology of American race relations, and in the impact of technology on the social mechanisms of American society at large. Moreover, there is much to recommend the story of B.B. King as plain human drama.” Quote source - B.B. King biographer, Charles Sawyer

“...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 three **videos**; two documentary videos and one performance video. See links to videos in Resources.

- *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>
- Mississippi Blues Trail <http://msbluestrail.org>
- The Blues Classroom, a series of lesson plans based on a 2003 PBS mini-series, *The Blues* <http://www.pbs.org>

#### Vocabulary:

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

#### Lesson Extensions:

- Visit the B.B. King Museum and Delta Interpretive Center
- Research life stories of other famous people
- Listen to examples of blues music by other performers
- View (preview first) additional YouTube or GuitarTube videos of selected performances by B.B. King.
- Visit the website of the Mississippi Blues Trail to see B.B. King's markers

- Reflect on "Food for Thought" quotes. 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, World War II, the Civil Rights Era, the building of the Interstate Highway system, the growth of American music, the advent of computers, the expansion of technology, etc.
- Introduce the lesson with a question, "Who is Mississippi's best known blues performer today?" If someone has the right answer, follow-up with questions about what students already know about B.B. King.
- Share with students some photos and facts of B.B. King's life as recorded in the biographies listed in the Resources section of this plan.
- 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 objectives of the lesson. Show the movie trailer for, *Life of Riley*. After the video, ask students to describe what B.B. King's early life might have been like.
- In a long and continuous career, B.B. King has witnessed a lot of America's history first-hand. Divide the class into three or four-person groups for some factual research. Assign each group a segment of B.B. King's life from 1925 to the present, *i.e.*, 1925-1949, 1950 - 70, etc. Give each group a *B.B. King timeline and a U.S. History timeline* (see Resources/links). Ask the groups to identify significant events in King's life and in U.S. History, paying particular attention to events or life experiences that might have had an effect on B.B. King's career.
- Ask each group to answer the following question in relation to the years they reviewed: What events did you identify that promoted or challenged B. B. King's music career?
- Ask each group to share their answer to the question with the class. Facilitate the group reports by asking follow-up questions, leading a discussion or clarifying information.
- View the video, *Welcome to the Story of B.B. King*. Some individuals in the film are lifelong acquaintances. Ask students for their reflections of the vignettes included in the film story. It may be helpful to guide their reflections through questioning.
- B.B. King's early experiences as a traveling musician brought him to hundreds of cities and small towns. He usually played in small night clubs for black audiences, often playing three hundred or more performances each year. In the late 1960s he hired a new manager, and things began to change. A catalyst in that change was a recording of *The Thrill is Gone*, which was successful as a Rhythm & Blues (R&B) single, and was also ranked on the Pop chart, eventually earning him his first Grammy Award. Play the video of a live performance of *The Thrill is Gone*, which has been a concert favorite since 1969.

and to find other information related to the blues.

- View the travel schedule posted on the B.B. King website.

### Standards and Competencies

#### Mississippi Social Studies Framework of 2011, 9-12

7. Understand the origins and contributions of African Americans to the mainstream American Culture.

a. Explain the origins and impact that different types of musical expressions of African Americans (e.g., Gospel, Spirituals, Blues, Jazz, Rock and Roll, Rhythm and Blues, and Hip-Hop) have on the mainstream American music tradition.

#### Common Core State Standards

**ELA Reading:** Informational Text, Integration of knowledge and ideas

**RI.9 -10.7.** Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person's life story both in print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

**ELA Writing:** Text Types and Purposes

**W.11-12.2** Write informative or explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization and analysis of content .

- Ask students to reflect on the performance, especially on the guitar solo. B.B. King uses guitar solos to intensify the emotion of the feelings expressed in the lyrics of a blues song.
- The success of *The Thrill is Gone* led to performances for large audiences at colleges and in large theatres across the country, and eventually around the world. A growing audience of young people helped secure his fame.
- B.B. King has been performing for audiences for more than sixty years. He travels in a custom tour bus, giving about 100 concerts each year. He visits Mississippi each year for a Homecoming.
- Ask students: Why do you think B.B. King maintains a steady schedule of travel and appearances? [To stay connected to audiences; his love of the blues; his desire to keep the blues alive; to support his family; to stay connected to friends across the country who have supported him throughout his career, etc.]
- Ask the students to think about their own lives now: people who have influenced them, life experiences and events, things they care deeply about. These are the building blocks of a person's future. Ask them to express these building blocks through a writing assignment you design, or use the **Bio Poem** form that is provided.
- Invite students to volunteer to read their work or Bio Poem to the class.

**Note:** There are two more lessons in this curriculum for grades 9-12.

#### ASSESSMENT(S)

1. Evaluate student responses to the question prompted by the video trailer, *The Life of Riley* to determine if they need more background information about what life was like in the mid 1920s and 1930s.
2. Offer verbal feedback of follow-up questions to student groups as they report on their assigned years in the timeline comparison.
3. Observe student reflections following viewing the Story of B.B. King. The people in the video knew him as a young person, and understand his roots in blues music and in the Mississippi delta.
4. Listen to and analyze student comments after they hear *The Thrill is Gone*. Look for responses that refer to the guitar sound, the emotion in the singing, and the performance of the musicians in the band.
5. Observe student responses to the question about B.B. King's year-around travel schedule. Invite them to examine his website for more information.
6. Use standard assessment procedures to grade the Bio Poem.

#### LESSON RESOURCES

1. Brief Biography of B.B. King  
<http://www.bbking.com/bio/>
2. B. B. King's Life History – birth to late teens  
<http://msbluestrail.org/blues-trail-markers/kilmichael-b-b-kings-roots#>  
<http://msbluestrail.org/blues-trail-markers/b-b-king-birthplace>

**ELA Speaking and****Listening:** Comprehension and Collaboration

**SL.9-10.1** 1. Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9 - 10 topics, texts and issues, building others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

**Reading History:** Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

**RH.9-11.7** Integrate quantitative or technical analysis (e.g., charts, research data) with qualitative analysis in print or digital text.

**Reading History:** Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

**RH.11-12.7** Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

**Mississippi Visual and Performing Arts Framework,****High School General Music**

6. Analyze forms and subject matter in music that recur in various cultures, times, and places. (CA, HC, C)

- a. Discuss the historical development of music in various cultures and places from antiquity through the twentieth century.

3. Photo gallery: photos with captions about stages of B.B. King's life: <http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=bbking&tabgroupid=icb.tabgroup100798>
4. Video: *Welcome to the Story of B.B. King*, compiled vignettes about B.B. King's life from those who have known him, and the man, himself. B.B. King Museum Homepage. <http://www.bbkingmuseum.org/>
5. Video: *The Life of Riley* (Movie Trailer, 2:28) <http://www.bbking.com/2012/10/09/b-b-king-the-life-of-riley-2/>
6. B.B. King time line, compiled by Charles Sawyer <http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=bbking&pageid=icb.page301659>
7. U. S. History Timeline: 1900 – 1949 <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0903596.html>  
1950 – 1999 <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0903597.html>  
2000 – 2010 <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0903598.html>
8. Bio Poem Blank Form
9. Video: *The Thrill is Gone*, 4:32, recorded in 1991. <http://www.guitar-tube.com/watch/bb-king-the-thrill-is-gone>