

B.B. KING MUSEUM AND DELTA INTERPRETIVE CENTER

Curriculum Lesson Plans Grades 9 - 12

The Blues' Influence on American Culture

Content Area(s):

Language Arts
American History
Mississippi History
Music

Related Themes:

Careers
Blues
Migration
American Music
Popular Music

Overview of the lesson:

The Blues have had a strong, lasting influence on American music and culture. The lesson views that influence through Blues and Gospel music examples, poetry and visual art.

Proposed Time Frame: One to two class periods, or more.

Materials:

Task Description Cards
Blues History Article
Blues Impact Article
Blues Flow Chart
Gospel Music Article
Gospel Music Time Line
Langston Hughes Handout
Benny Andrews Handout
Group Task Rubric

Equipment:

Internet connection and video projector; music examples;

BIG IDEA: Every type of music reflects the time in which it is created. The Blues music of the 20th Century continues to evolve, reflecting the life and times of its creators, and influencing the music and other art that is created for today's audiences.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Students will...

1. Analyze similarities and differences between Blues music and Gospel music.
2. Observe the influence of Blues and Gospel on the evolution of popular music.
3. Discover how Blues music has influenced American artists and writers.

Background: B.B. King attended church regularly during his childhood. The pastor, Archie Fair, was part of his extended family on his mother's side. He introduced young Riley to the guitar and taught him three chords, which he learned well enough to begin playing in church. "Much has been written about the connection between gospel and blues, about how they are just different sides of the same coin. It's obvious that the two forms are structurally similar, and also that both played a similar role in sustaining life in African American communities during those times. What is not often mentioned is the parallel in the dynamics of performance between preacher and congregation on the one hand, and blues performer and juke-joint audience on the other....Thus Riley learned much more than just how to play a guitar and sing...He learned to help people gathered in congregation to throw off their earthly cares like wretched rags as they reached toward sweet deliverance from whatever it was that ailed their souls. This purging of trouble-in-mind is the deep purpose of B.B.'s blues performances even today, and on his best nights the deliverance is mutual."

– Charles Sawyer's Introduction to *B.B. King Treasures*

Perspective on the blues:

Blues is a music that's highly personalized, that deals with fairly intimate personal relationships, so you have to read through the songs to see broader social issues. But the personal relationships described in the blues are affected by social conditions of poverty, racism, the nature of work, rural life, and so on, and these shape how people relate to each other...blues are

computer speakers; computers for group work; head sets for listening during group work

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
- Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, <http://rockhall.com>
- Mississippi Blues Trail and Curriculum <http://msbluestrail.org>

Vocabulary:

- Back-up singers
- Call and Response Songs
- Genre
- Gospel Music
- The Blues

Lesson Extensions:

- Visit the B.B. King Museum and Delta Interpretive Center
- Research life stories of a different famous person, musician, artist or poet
- 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

not usually songs of ideology or protest. But you can detect an overriding aura of dissatisfaction in the blues. They deal with the changes and fluctuations of life, and the possibilities of change, too, on a very personal level. – David Evans, *Delta Blues Music* – PBS American Experience

Perspective on gospel music:

Black gospel music has changed greatly since the middle 1950s. It has become more sophisticated, particularly in terms of marketing and musical diversity.... These changes are part of a natural musical and cultural evolution. Black gospel music changed as the demands of popular culture increased and as Afro-Americans strove toward middle class status. Black gospel music remains, however, essentially conservative, and its principal mission remains constant – to lift the spirits of its participants and to help them express their religion. – *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, edited by William Ferris and Charles Reagan Wilson

PROCEDURES

- Introduce the lesson by asking the students what they know about two original American musical forms, Blues and Gospel. Evaluate the responses to determine if a clearer distinction needs to be made, or if more background information would benefit their understanding.
- Follow up with these questions: 1) Do different types of music change or stay the same over time? Why, or why not? 2) Can you think of a new type of popular music that people enjoy listening to? Guide this discussion, limiting it to a few responses. For possible answers, see the link in Lesson Resources #2.
- In today's lesson, we will consider the ways music changes, and how one kind of music can be an influence on others. We will start with an example played by B.B. King, *Nobody Loves Me But My Mother*. In this example, he is clearly playing and singing a Blues song. However, the use of the organ, and the way it is played, is a strong reminder of Gospel music.
- Ask the students to respond to the performance, encouraging comments about the guitar solos, the singing, the supporting musicians' role, the overall mood of the song, what B.B. King does to convey the mood of the song, etc.

- If students are accustomed to working in groups, assign, or allow them to choose one of four topic groups: Blues; Gospel; Poetry; Visual Art. Each group will read articles, analyze examples, and report out to the class. Articles and examples may be found in the Lesson Resources.
- Each group will need time to read articles, view examples and discuss how they will report to the class. It may be necessary to establish a certain order for groups to access the computer or other areas of class.
- If you decide to teach the whole group, allow sufficient time for introducing background information from articles, discussion of the music selections, the artworks and the poetry.

<p>and to find other information related to the blues.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • View additional Blues and Gospel music videos • Update the Blues Flow Chart to include recent performers or new genres <p>Standards and Competencies</p> <p>Common Core</p> <p>State Standards</p> <p>Reading: Informational Text; Craft and Structure RI.11-12.5 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text.</p> <p>Writing: Research to Build and Present Knowledge W.11-12.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.</p> <p>Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration SL.11-12.1. Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guide the students toward success in their <u>small group presentations</u> by reminding them to be concise, to speak clearly, and to support their ideas with evidence. Likewise, remind classmates to be a good audience while their peers are presenting. • Allow a short time for <u>question/answer</u> between the audience and the presenting group. Be prepared to ask a question to the group, so that the discussion can begin. • <u>Closing the lesson.</u> Following the group presentations, return to the Big Idea statement and lesson objectives. <u>Ask students</u> how their understanding has changed, especially in the way that Blues music has affected American writers, musicians, artists, and the culture, in general. <p>Note: There are two more lessons in this curriculum for grades 9 – 12.</p> <hr/> <p>ASSESSMENT</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Observe student participation and responses in discussion questions at the beginning of the lesson. 2. A rubric (see resources) may be used to assess students' group work. 3. Consider giving students a participation grade for their group work. 4. Determine through observation how well the students grasp the concept of the evolution of music and other art forms. 5. Depending on the quality of student presentations, consider inviting another class or guests to observe the presentations. <hr/> <p>LESSON RESOURCES</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Video: <i>Nobody Loves Me But My Mother</i>, 3:42, a recording that utilizes Hammond organ and a small rhythm group (bass and drums) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OIW4ARVbhrw 2. Types of Popular Music by genre name. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_popular_music_genres 3. Article: <i>Black Gospel Music</i>, Encyclopedia of Southern Culture, edited by William Ferris and Charles Reagan Wilson http://www.arts.state.ms.us/crossroads/music/gospel/mu2_text.html 4. Gospel Music Evolution: Decade by Decade History of Gospel Music http://www.gospelmusicrevolution.com/history_4.html
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**Speaking and Listening:
Presentation of Knowledge
and Ideas**

SL.11-12.5 Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

**Mississippi Visual and
Performing Arts Framework**

High School General Music

3. Listen to, analyze, and evaluate music in a variety of forms and styles. (CA)

- a. Using critical thinking and listening skills, identify and analyze the basic elements of music.

Visual Art III

6. Analyze the impact of artists and the visual arts on society. (HC)

- a. Research how the functions and impact of art changes as society changes.
- b. Assess the impact of visual arts on modern society.

5. Article: *The Blues*, Encyclopedia of Southern Culture, edited by William Ferris and Charles Reagan Wilson
<http://www.arts.state.ms.us/crossroads/guides/background.html>
6. Gospel Group Audio Link: *The Shepherd Song*, 2:00. The Myles Family of Mississippi, singing. The link includes a short biography of the group.
http://www.arts.state.ms.us/folklife/artist.php?dirname=myles_family
7. Gospel Choir Performance Video: *When I Rose This Morning*, 8:57. The Mississippi Mass Choir (2007).
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mwMzirVEyeg>
8. Gospel Performance Video: *Brighter Day*, 6:38, Kirk Franklin
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VTBtW3rD74>
9. Blues Song and Lyrics: *The Sky is Crying*, 4:10, Stevie Ray Vaughn
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBYsJVrni3Q&list=TLxOfjUEgx3qQ>
10. Blues Song and Lyrics: *Pride and Joy*, 4:29, Bonnie Raitt
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Mylo0piAgc&list=TL8TE_CxrFcKE
11. Blues Flow Chart: This document originated on the website of Kansas State University. The handout link is no longer active, although the information is valid.
12. Essay excerpt: *Delta Blues Music*, David Evans – PBS American Experience: Fatal Flood.
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/primary-resources/flood-delta-blues/>
13. Audio Link: History of Gospel Music, 8:19, Robert Darden
<http://www.npr.org/player/v2/mediaPlayer.html?action=1&t=1&islist=false&id=4233793&m=4233920>
14. Langston Hughes Video, 3:33
<http://www.biography.com/people/langston-hughes-9346313>
15. Article: Langston Hughes Bio, handout.
<http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/83>
16. Article: The Blues and Langston Hughes, handout.
http://www.folkways.si.edu/explore_folkways/poetry.aspx
17. Group Task Rubric: <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/ctndirectdownload.aspx?AssetID=TC103463086&Application=WD&Version=15&Result=2#>