

Lesson 27

Museum Connection: Art and Intellect

Lesson Title: Harlem: All That Jazz *and* Blues

Purpose: In this lesson students will identify some of the leading African American blues and jazz musicians of the Harlem Renaissance. They will create their own blues lyrics and perform the song for or with the class.

Grade Level and Content Area: Elementary, Fine Arts

Time Frame: 3 class periods

Fine Arts Music Essential Learner Outcomes:

- II.D.1 Perform songs representing a variety of historical periods, genres, and cultures
- II.D.3 Identify and compare music from various historical periods and cultures and works written by exemplary composers.

Fine Arts Music State Curriculum:

- 2.2.b (Grades 4 and 5) Perform songs and dances from a variety of historical periods and world cultures, including some connected to general classroom studies
- 2.2.c (Grades 4) Listen to and describe musical examples that represent styles and traditions from various historical periods and world cultures
- 2.2.c (Grade 5) Listen to and compare musical examples that represent styles and traditions from various historical periods and world cultures
- 3.2 (Grades 4 and 5) Develop readiness for composing and arranging by experimenting with sound

Correlation to Reading and English Language Arts Maryland College and Career Ready Standards:

- 3.A.4 (Grade 4) Use elements of poetry to facilitate understanding
- 3.A.4 (Grade 5) Analyze elements of poetry to facilitate understanding and interpretation
- 4.A.2 (Grades 4 and 5) Compose oral, written, and visual presentations that express personal ideas, inform, and persuade

Objective:

Students will write lyrics to a song that expresses the “blues” found in music of the Harlem Renaissance. They will then sing their lyrics using an existing blues melody.

Vocabulary and Concepts:

Blues – The blues is music based on simple chords and melodies, the deep emotion of spirituals, and the laments of call-and-response songs of African Americans before the turn of the 20th century. Although the blues are frequently melancholy, as a musical form they may cover a wide range of topics from standing in the rain to true love. W. C. Handy from Memphis, Tennessee, is considered the “Father of the Blues.”

Dixieland – Dixieland jazz music began in New Orleans, where street parades led by musicians are still in evidence today. It consists of a small brass band playing marching music and using elaborate improvisation. Several instruments may improvise simultaneously in Dixieland bands.

Improvisation – Improvisation is music in which the performer independently embellishes the melody or introduces new melodic material. Improvisation appears in many forms, both in Europe and in Africa, but it is African improvisation that directly parallels jazz improvisation.

Jazz – Jazz is a mixture of several musical styles: blues, ragtime, and Dixieland. Syncopation and improvisation, added to the variety of styles that jazz represents, gives the music its own definitive style.

Mood – The mood is the emotion an author, composer, or performer intends to convey in a song, lyric, or presentation.

Ragtime – Ragtime music began as improvisational piano in the honkytonks, cafes, and gambling houses along the Mississippi River. Often piano players added crude lyrics to blues melodies. Ragtime incorporates a syncopated beat and flamboyant melody. From such rugged beginnings, ragtime became highly popular music during the 1890s and remained popular through the 1920s. The ragtime piano player was a strong influence on the music of the Harlem Renaissance. Eubie Blake, from Baltimore, is considered a superb ragtime performer and composer.

Renaissance – Renaissance means, literally, a rebirth. The Italian Renaissance is the period from the 14th to the 16th century when the arts and humanities flourished in Italian city-states. The term also refers to the abundant art forms and literature found in Harlem during the 1920s and 1930s.

Rhyme scheme – The arrangement of rhymes in a stanza or poem.

Stride piano – The stride style of piano playing derives from ragtime and is achieved by alternating low bass notes with chords in the left hand while improvising active and frequently syncopated melodies in the right hand.

Syncopation – Syncopation is music in which the accent is placed on a normally unaccented beat. First heard in the United States in early banjo music and ragtime, syncopation developed from African American rhythm patterns.

Materials

For the teacher:

Recording of “The Entertainer,” by Scott Joplin

- Joplin, Scott. *The Entertainer*. Biograph Series. Shout! Factory, 2003.

Recording of “Oh When the Saints,” an African American folk song, in the ragtime style

- *Spotlight on Music*. Grade 5. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004.
- *Share the Music*. Grade 5. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000.
- *Music and You*. Grade 5. New York: Macmillan, 1988.
- *Makin’ Music*. Grade 2. Morristown, New Jersey: Silver Burdett Ginn, 2002.
- *Music Connection*. Grade 1. Morristown, New Jersey: Silver Burdett Ginn, 1995.
- *World of Music*. Grades 1 and 5. Morristown, New Jersey: Silver Burdett and Ginn, 1991.

Recording of “Joe Turner Blues,” an African American blues song

- *Share the Music*. Grade 5. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000.
- *Makin’ Music*. Grade 4. Morristown, New Jersey: Silver Burdett Ginn, 2002.
- *Music Connection*. Grade 4. Morristown, New Jersey: Silver Burdett Ginn, 1995.
- *World of Music*. Grade . Morristown, New Jersey: Silver Burdett and Ginn, 1991.

Recording of “Poor Man’s Blues” by Bessie Smith

- Smith, Bessie. *Queen of the Blues*. The Gold Collection. Fine Tune Records, 2002.

Teacher Resource Sheet 1: Joe Turner Blues lyrics and notation

Teacher Resource Sheet 2: Poor Man’s Blues lyrics and notation

Student:

Student Resource Sheet 1: Create Your Own Blues Lyrics

Student Resource Sheet 2: Create Your Own Blues Song—Sample

Student Resource Sheet 3: Create Your Own Blues Song

Resources

Books:

Anderson, Jervis. *This Was Harlem: A Cultural Portrait, 1900-1950*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1982.

Baker, Josephine, and Jo Bouillon. *Josephine*. Translated by Mariana Fitzpatrick. New York: Harper & Row, 1977.

Driskell, David, David Levering Lewis, and Deborah Willis Ryan. *Harlem Renaissance: Art of Black America*. New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1987.

Huggins, Nathan Irvin. *Harlem Renaissance*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1971.

Hughes, Langston. *Not Without Laughter*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1930.

Hughes, Langston. *The Weary Blues*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926.

Powell, Richard J. "The Blues Aesthetic: Black Culture and Modernism." Paper presented in conjunction with the exhibit at Washington Project for the Arts, Washington, D.C., 1989.

Rummel, Jack. *Langston Hughes*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988.

Schoener, Allon, ed. *Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900-1968*. New York: Random House, 1968.

Siskind, Aaron. *Harlem Photographs, 1932-1940*. Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990.

Surge, Frank. *Singers of the Blues*. Minneapolis: Lerner Publications Co., 1969.

Recordings:

Blake, Eubie. *Memories of You*. Biograph Series. Shout! Factory, 2003.

Smith, Bessie. *Sings the Blues*. Sony Special Product, 1996.

Smith, Bessie. *St. Louis Blues: Original 1924-1925 Recordings*. Naxos, 2003.

Teacher Background:

The United States experienced a period of change and mobility during and after World War I. Dissatisfied with the severe limitations of "Jim Crow" laws and the poor, often isolated, living conditions in the Deep South, many African Americans moved to large northern cities hoping for better job opportunities and good schools. As their populations swelled, urban communities in New York, Detroit, and Chicago teemed with talented African Americans. Artists, musicians, writers, actors, and dancers came together and developed vibrant new art forms that derived from African heritage, the spiritual values and gospel music of churches, and the dominant European culture. This rebirth of arts and culture—known at the time as the "New Negro Movement"—was

most pronounced in Harlem, New York, which pulsated with the excitement of achievement in the 1920s. The photographs of James VanDerZee document this excitement, as well as the glamorous lives of the period's entertainers in the city's ballrooms and theaters.

Other migrants to the cities, however, did not find satisfying jobs or good living conditions. Churches moved uptown to Harlem in order to serve their needs, and cultural centers were established. At the same time many people involved in the Harlem Renaissance, as this movement is now known, also began to express their hopes for civil liberties and true equality; out of this environment came the NAACP and the modern civil rights movement. Artists too began to take a new look at the benefits and constraints of urban life and use their work in order to examine the society in which they lived. Artists such as Romare Bearden, William Johnson, and Jacob Lawrence created visual images of the harsher aspects of life in the city, while musicians like Bessie Smith used the "blues" to express the sorrows and trials of the period.

Jazz—the music of the Harlem Renaissance—had its roots in the syncopated rhythms of Africa and the sounds of the Dixieland and ragtime bands of New Orleans. The earliest form of jazz was known as the blues, and it stemmed from the work songs and spirituals created by slaves. Combining African beats and call-and-response style with the minor melodies and chord progressions of Western European music, the blues originally involved sparse instrumental accompaniment, such as the banjo or guitar. Soon blues artists added classical instruments, like the piano, string bass, trumpet, and saxophone, in order to add texture and complexity to the compositions.

Blues lyrics have had just as strong an influence on the world of music as the blues sound. Folk songs of the 19th century were sentimental and nostalgic, but the blues introduced a heavily personal tone. In fact, most blues artists injected their songs with the sound of heartbreak and hardship that characterized the period of the Harlem Renaissance for so many people. Many early blues singers, such as "Ma" Rainey and Bessie Smith, were women with a background in gospel music and spirituals. Noted for her rousing voice and vigorous style, Smith recorded many songs that featured intimate account of her personal woes.

Some poets of the Harlem Renaissance also adopted the tone of sorrow and longing expressed by the blues. Born in Joplin, Missouri, and raised in Laurence, Kansas, Langston Hughes attended Columbia University in New York. As a columnist for the African American newspaper the *Chicago Defender*, Hughes chronicled the daily hopes and despairs of his people. An award-winning poet, Hughes named his first book of poetry, *Weary Blues*, after a poem that describes the plight of African Americans, who migrated from the South to cities like Detroit, Chicago, Washington, Baltimore, and New York.

Lesson Development:

1. **Motivation:** Play the ragtime recording, "The Entertainer," by Scott Joplin. Have students use movement in order to express the mood, rhythms, tempo, and

dynamics of the piece. Ask students of their experiences with this type of music, and explore their prior knowledge. Begin to address musical elements (e.g., instrumentation, tempo, dynamics, and style). Collect the ideas as a class for later use.

2. Explain that the style of the piece is ragtime, defining the term and discussing the musical elements. Note that both ragtime and Dixieland music were early forms of jazz, and follow up by playing the Dixieland recording, "Oh When the Saints." Again have the students move freely to the music, or lead a parade around the room. Discuss the elements of Dixieland, and compare these with those of ragtime.
3. Have students express their ideas of the music's origins. Lead into a class discussion about the Harlem Renaissance, its art, and its artists. Stress the following concepts:
 - African Americans migrated to Harlem, New York (as well as other large cities such as New Orleans, Kansas City, Detroit, and Chicago) in order to seek a better life. They created art forms involving their African roots with themes developed from life in the American South.
 - Writers, musicians, and artists of this period (such as Blake, Ellington, Armstrong, Rainey, Smith, Bearden, Johnson, and Lawrence) led the way in developing art forms that expressed individual, communal, and cultural ideas and concerns.
 - The city of Baltimore also served as a cultural center. Artists Eubie Blake, Cab Calloway, Billie Holliday, and Chick Webb all had their roots in Baltimore. Like the Cotton Club and Savoy of Harlem, the Royal Theater in Baltimore featured novel performances.
 - Blues music, the beginnings of jazz, stemmed from work songs and spirituals that were created during the period of slavery by Africans and African Americans. By combining their African musical roots in syncopated (off-beat) rhythms and call-and-response forms with minor melodies and Western European chord progressions, African Americans created their own distinct styles of music. Blues originally involved sparse instrumental accompaniment, such as the banjo or guitar, but soon added classical instruments (e.g., the piano, string bass, trumpet, and saxophone) for more texture and complexity.
 - Blues songs channel personal feelings of struggle, sorrow, and angst in music just as the poetry of Langston Hughes does in literature.
4. Introduce the topic of the blues as personal expression. Play a blues recording by Bessie Smith ("Poor Man's Blues"). Ask the students to move again to the music, and note the differences in sound between the blues piece and the ragtime and Dixieland pieces.
5. Read a few titles of blues songs (e.g., "Down Hearted Blues," "I Ain't Got Nobody," and "The St. Louis Blues," etc.), and ask students to reflect on the topics and themes of most blues songs.

6. Present the song “Joe Turner Blues” (Teacher Resource Sheet 1), and have the students sing and identify the overall mood. (You may wish to explore the blues scale or chord progression at this time.)
7. Display Teacher Resource Sheet 2, “Poor Man’s Blues.” Replay the recording, and again have students identify the overall mood through the music and text. Ask students which lines or phrases rhyme.
8. Suggest a blues theme, such as rain, that would appeal to students. Present a verse of lyrics such as:

Can’t go out and play today ‘cause we got rain
Can’t go out and play today ‘cause we got rain
Lovin’ sports and livin’ here is just one pain

Note that the first line is repeated twice and the last line usually rhymes with the other two. (Sometimes words do not rhyme precisely, and often slang is used or created to allow for rhyming). The lyric form for the typical 12-bar blues involves stanzas with three phrases arranged as an opening statement that declares the blues topic, a repetition of the first line, and a final line that relates to the previous idea.

9. Ask students to create as a class a blues verse. Have students suggest themes they would use (such as homework, a sibling, or chores), and then note their lyrics on the board.
10. Distribute **Student Resource Sheet 1, Create Your Own Blues Lyrics**. Have students compose original lyrics, working independently to elicit more creative work. Follow up by asking students to share their work with a partner.
11. Using **Student Resource Sheets 2 and 3**, have students compose lyrics with a partner using the suggested rhythms for a guide. Discuss how each note of the rhythmic line needs a syllable of text, and practice syllable counting with students. Utilize the sample provided.
12. At the end of the session, ask each pair to present their work, or have the class sing (using the melody from “Joe Turner’s Blues” previously performed) or chant (using the notated rhythm) each song. (Emphasize the need to be a good audience and accept everyone’s efforts.)
13. **Assessment:** Have individual students develop a three-line lyric using the format from **Student Resource Sheet 1**.

Modified Assessment: Have students develop their own blues lyrics using **Student Resource Sheets 2 and 3**.

14. **Closure:** Have students identify the theme(s) of the lyrics. Pose questions such as:

- How does the music reflect the lyrics of the song, or vice versa?
- What words or sounds help to identify the blues?
- How does the music reflect the period and culture in which it is produced?

Thoughtful Application:

Determine how the blues music of the Harlem Renaissance has influenced contemporary music. Cite examples.

Lesson Extensions:

- Pennsylvania Avenue was the place to experience the music and ambiance of Baltimore's "NEW Negro" renaissance. Now you know the music of Eubie Blake, Chick Webb, Billie Holiday, Ruby Glover, Ethel Ennis and Blanche Calloway, take a walk along "the Avenue" installed in the Reginald F. Lewis Museum's third floor exhibitions "Messages in Music " and "Pennsylvania Avenue." The exhibits capture the Jazz scene in lively detail. How does Ruby Clover's story enhance your knowledge of the work and life experience of African American musicians during the 20th Century.
- Using the blues scale, develop a melody for your blues lyrics and perform the song for your class.
- Discuss the chord progression of the blues and how to build and play a chord on a melodic instrument. Perform the chords as accompaniment to a blues instrumental melody or song.
- Improvise blues melodies using melodic instruments. (For instance, using a barred instrument, only leave the pitches of the blues scale to play. Have the chord progression performed as accompaniment.)
- Arrange or perform an existing blues piece with an instrumental ensemble. A small vocal ensemble could perform the melody with the instrumentalists.
- Identify the instruments that accompany the singer in order to reinforce blues songs. Listen to instrumental recordings of the period in order to hear the lament without words. Identify the dances of the 1920s to connect them to the style of the music.
- Connect original blues to contemporary blues by creating a project or research paper, or compare blues to other genres and styles of music (noting influences, similarities, and historical and cultural contexts).
- Connect the lyric writing more directly to poetry, such as that of Langston Hughes. Discuss theme, mood, and expression, as well as rhythm, syllabic structure, and rhyme scheme.

Teacher Resource Sheet 1

Joe Turner Blues

W.C. Handy, 1915

They tell me Joe Tur-ner's come and gone. They tell me Joe Tur-ner's come and

gone Oh Lor - dy. Got my man and gone.

2. He came here, with forty links of chain.
He came here, with forty links of chain.
He left me here to sing this song.

Teacher Resource Sheet 2

Teacher Resource Sheet #1

Poor Man's Blues

Bessie Smith

arr. A. K. Olsen

Soprano

Swing

The musical notation for the Soprano part is written on a single staff in treble clef with a common time signature (C). The tempo is marked 'Swing'. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The melody consists of four lines of music. The first line contains the lyrics '1. Mis ter rich man, — rich man, — o pen up your heart — and mind.' with a '1' above the staff. The second line contains the lyrics 'Mis ter rich man, — rich man, — o pen up your heart and mind.' with 'I' above the staff. The third line contains the lyrics 'Give the poor man a chance, help stop — these hard, — hard times.' with 'I', 'V7', and 'IV' above the staff. The fourth line is empty with 'I' above the staff. The notation includes various note values, rests, and a triplet in the third line.

1. Mis ter rich man, — rich man, — o pen up your heart — and mind.

Mis ter rich man, — rich man, — o pen up your heart and mind.

Give the poor man a chance, help stop — these hard, — hard times.

2. While you're livin' in your mansion, you don't know what hard times means.
While you're livin' in your mansion, you don't know what hard times means.
Poor working man's wife is starvin', your wife is livin' like a queen.
3. Please, listen to my pleading, 'cause I can't stand these hard times long.
Oh, listen to my pleading, 'cause I can't stand these hard times long.
They'll make an honest mand do things that you know is wrong.
4. Poor man fought all the battles, poor man would fight again today.
Poor man fought all the battles, poor man would fight again today.
He would do anything you ask him in the name of the USA.
5. Now the war is over, poor man must live the same as you.
Now the war is over, poor man must live the same as you.
If it wasn't for the poor man, mister rich man what would you do?

Student Resource Sheet 1

Create Your Own Blues Lyrics

Directions: Following the three-line blues rhyme scheme, create your own blues lyrics. An example of the form is given below:

It's rainin' homework and I got no umbrella
It's rainin' homework and I got no umbrella
Gotta wish I were some other fella

Notice that all the lines rhyme. You may extend it to a second verse:

Why do they expect me to do this stuff?
Why do they expect me to do this stuff?
A third-grader's* life is really rough.

*substitute appropriate grade level

Begin your own blues lyric. Underline your rhyming words.

Title of Song: _____

Student Resource Sheet 2

Student Resource Sheet #2

Create Your Own Blues Lyrics-Sample

- Directions:
- Count the total number of phrases. How many are there?
 - Add up the number of beats in each measure. What is the meter or time signature?
 - Look again at the lyrics. How many syllables do you see for each note?
 - Which two phrases are the same?
 - Which words between the phrases rhyme?
 - Using the melody of "Joe Turner Blues," sing through these lyrics.

Swing

Percussion

The musical notation consists of two staves. The top staff is labeled 'Percussion' and 'Swing'. It shows a 4/4 time signature and a melody line with lyrics: 'This home work, — it real ly — is a pain. — This home work — it'. The bottom staff continues the melody with lyrics: 'real ly — is a pain. — If I don't — fin ish I will — go in — sane!'. The melody is written in a simple, bluesy style with a consistent rhythm.

This home work, — it real ly — is a pain. — This home work — it

real ly — is a pain. — If I don't — fin ish I will — go in — sane!

Create Your Own Blues Lyrics

- Directions:
- You need to create three lines or phrases of lyrics, considering there are four beats in each measure.
 - Remember to only use one syllable for each note of the rhythm.
 - Be sure to use the same last words for the first and second phrases.
 - Make the last word of the third phrase rhymes with the last word of phrases one and two.
 - Use the melody of "Joe Turner Blues" to sing your song!

Swing

Percussion

Student Resource Sheet 3

Student Resource Sheet #3

Create Your Own Blues Lyrics

- Directions:
- You need to create three lines or phrases of lyrics, considering there are four beats in each measure.
 - Remember to only use one syllable for each note of the rhythm.
 - Be sure to use the same last words for the first and second phrases.
 - Make the last word of the third phrase rhymes with the last word of phrases one and two.
 - Use the melody of "Joe Turner Blues" to sing your song!

Percussion

Swing