

JSU - TPS Teaching with Primary Sources

TEACHER: Ann Marie Marshal

SCHOOL: O. M. McNair Middle School

DATE: March 6-10, 20-24, 2023

UNIT TITLE/THEME: the Blues

GRADE LEVEL: 6th-8th Grade

LESSON TITLE: the Birth of the Delta Blues and Their Impact on Modern American Music

TIME REQUIRED: 5+ hours

Student “I Can” statement:

“I can analyze the differences and similarities between different blues musicians.”

“I can analyze the differences and similarities between the blues and other genres that came from the blues, such as jazz, rock’n’roll, hip hop, and rap.”

“I can discuss the relationships between the spread of the blues throughout the U.S. and people’s daily life.”

Standards:

MU: RE7.2.8 Perceive and analyze artistic work. Analyze how the structure and context of varied musical works inform the response.

b. Identify and compare the context of programs of music from a variety of genres, cultures, and historical periods.

MU: CN11.0.8 Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding. Relate musical ideas and works with varied context to deepen understanding.

a. Demonstrate understanding of relationships between music and the other arts, other disciplines, varied contexts, and daily life.

Objectives:

SWBAT analyze blues songs from various artists.

SWBAT identify and compare the context of music from a variety of genres and historical periods.

SWBAT demonstrate understanding of relationships between music and daily life.

Materials/Resources Needed:

Anchor Text: [Mississippi Delta Blues: American Cornerstone](#); [Chicago Blues](#); [From Blues to Hip Hop](#) (I would heavily suggest that you use just the text from the last text)

Videos: [‘Bo Weavil Blues](#)’; [‘Cool Drink of Water Blues](#)’; [‘If I Had Possession Over Judgement Day](#)’; [‘Preachin’ Blues](#)’; [Charlie Patton - Dry Well Blues](#); [Bessie Smith - St. Louis Blues](#); [Koko Taylor - Walkin’ the Back Streets](#), [Ain’t Misbehavin’ by Fats Waller](#)

TPS Resources: [Delta Blues Album](#)

JSU - TPS Teaching with Primary Sources

Anticipatory Set:

DAY 1: INTRODUCING THE BLUES (90 MIN.)

Display this picture of the devil's crossroads in Clarksdale and ask students:

- “What do you see in this picture?”
- “What do you think ‘the Crossroads’ is? Where could it be?”
- “What is a crossroad?”



‘This is the crossroad between highways 49 and 61 in Clarksdale, Mississippi, the town that claims to be the birthplace of the blues. It’s here where the famous blues musician Robert Johnson supposedly sold his soul to the devil to become successful. We are going to learn about Johnson and a few other amazing Delta blues musicians today.’

Tell students that we are going to be focusing on the birth of the Delta Blues. Ask students what they know about the blues.

DAY 3: THE IMPACT OF THE BLUES - CITY BLUES (90 MIN.)

Show students this picture of Bessie Smith. Ask:

- How would you describe the woman in this picture?
- Where do you think she is?
- When do you think this was taken?

“This is a picture of Bessie Smith, the “Empress of Blues.” Today we will be talking about her and Chicago blues musicians like her and comparing them to the Delta blues musicians we’ve already listened to.”



DAY 4: THE IMPACT OF THE BLUES - JAZZ, FUNK, & HIP HOP (90 MIN.)

Play [Ain't Misbehavin' by Fats Waller](#) as students are getting settled. The video is a little silly so expect students to have a good laugh. Ask students:

- What do you think about the artist? The song?
- Do you think this was supposed to be a serious video?
- When do you think this video took place? Where could it possibly take place?

“This is ‘Ain’t Misbehavin’” by jazz musician Fats Waller. As the blues continued to gain in popularity, jazz, a new genre, was born. Today we are going to talk about the development of jazz, funk, and hip hop.”

Input:

- Before this lesson, we had a long-ish lesson on Robert Johnson and the legend of his deal with the devil to introduce students to a specific delta blues musician and to pique their interest with a really spooky legend.
 - For students outside of the Mississippi Delta or outside the state of Mississippi, they may need geographical context as to what/where the Mississippi Delta is and especially historical context to help
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JSU - TPS Teaching with Primary Sources

them understand why the blues were so significant to black southerners in the 1920s and 30s. This may be supplemented with a brief history lesson if desired.

Model:

DAY 1: INTRODUCING THE BLUES (90 MIN.)

As students are getting settled, pass out the Delta Blues Listening Worksheet and let them know we will be using it later on in the lesson.

TTW explain that we are going to begin reading our text, “Mississippi Delta Blues: American Cornerstone.” The text will introduce students to four different delta blues musicians as well as a modern group that has a tradition of covering blues classics.

- “The Delta Blues ar
- Read the first three paragraphs and stop. Ask students to take turns reading about the musicians.

TTW model analyzing a song by filling out the Charley Patton column on the listening worksheet.

Charley Patton’s [Bo Weevil Blues](#)

- Explain to students that the class is going to listen to and analyze the five artists the text mentioned. Tell them that you are about to fill out the column about Charley Patton. They should also be writing the information down and even add more if they can.
- ‘Before we even listen to the song I’m going to write down what I think the song is going to be about. Now I know that a boll weevil is a type of bug that really likes to eat crops. And it especially likes cotton, which was still Mississippi’s main crop around Patton’s time. So I think this song is going to be about boll weevils eating farmers’ crops.’
- Listen with the class to Charley Patton’s ‘Boweevil Blues’ before continuing to fill out the rest of the column.
- Allow students to share anything they think should be added to the worksheet.

TSW analyze the next three songs by filling out the worksheet individually or in pairs.

Tommy Johnson’s [‘Cool Drink of Water Blues’](#)

Robert Johnson’s [‘If I Had Possession Over Judgement Day’](#)

Son House’s [‘Preachin’ Blues’](#)

- Make sure that students have enough time before and after listening to each song to fill out their worksheet.
- After the class has completed the worksheet, ask students to share their observations and allow students to discuss their opinions.

DAY 3: THE IMPACT OF THE BLUES - CITY BLUES (90 MIN.)

TTW introduce students to the Chicago Blues, the next development of the delta blues and analyze the similarities and differences between the Delta Blues and Chicago Blues.

- Read [Chicago Blues](#) with the class. Allow students to read aloud.
 - “In our first lesson we talked about how the Delta blues began to spread thanks in large part to Charley Patton and Robert Johnson. Well the blues quickly spread in the 1920s and caught on across the country. The blues even developed into what we can call “city blues.” Chicago specifically was an important part of the development of city blues and was home to many famous singers like the ladies in the text. Can anyone
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JSU - TPS Teaching with Primary Sources

remember their names? [let students name the four women from the text] Well done. Today we are going to focus on Bessie Smith, the lady in the picture we saw at the beginning of class, and Koko Taylor.”

- Listen to [Bessie Smith - St. Louis Blues](#) and [Koko Taylor - Walkin' the Back Streets](#). After each recording, ask students to describe what they hear in the song (instrumentation, lyrics, etc.). Ask for their opinions on the music.

DAY 4: THE IMPACT OF THE BLUES - JAZZ & HIP HOP (90 MIN.)

TTW explain that the jazz didn't come directly from the blues, but was influenced by blues

- “It is important for us to note that jazz, like the song we just listened to from Fats Waller, did not come directly from the blues, but was evolving at the same time and eventually drew great influence from the blues. Jazz was born in New Orleans out of their traditional brass bands, which included a tuba, trombones, trumpets, clarinet and/or saxophone, snare drum, and bass drum. These bands traveled around the city and played all types of music of the time, especially dance songs. We see a similar style band in the ‘Ain’t Misbehavin’” video. Through the 40s and 50s jazz started to center more around show tunes and instrumental pieces rather than dance songs. In the 60s we even begin to see soul and funk, which we’ll listen to in a second.”
- Read [From Blues to Hip Hop](#). Allow students to read sections aloud. As you read, ask students;
 - According to the text, in what ways was the birth of hip hop similar to the birth of the blues?
 - What are some similarities the text lists between blues and hip hop?
 - How would you describe ‘call and response’?
 - What did Willie Dixon mean when he said ‘the blues are the roots and the other musics are the fruits?’

Check for Understanding:

DAY 1: INTRODUCING THE BLUES (90 MIN.)

TSW analyze three blues songs using the listening worksheet on their own or with a partner.

DAY 2: INTRODUCING THE BLUES CONT'D (45 MIN.)

TSW compare the context of two different versions of “Boweavil Blues” by responding to the following question:

- ‘You have now listened to two recordings of ‘Boweavil Blues’ from Charley Patton and the North Mississippi Allstars. Compare and contrast the two recordings. Make note of the overall feeling of the songs, what the singers sound like, and what instruments you hear. Give specific details from the recordings.’

DAY 4: THE IMPACT OF THE BLUES - JAZZ & HIP HOP (90 MIN.)

TSW listen to [How Blue Can You Get - B.B. King](#) and [Run's House - Run DMC](#) and compare and contrast the two genres of music.

- Beforehand explain that both of these songs are examples of ‘call and response.’
- After listening, tell students that

Guided Practice:

DAY 2: INTRODUCING THE BLUES CONT'D (45 min.)

Ask students to tell you about what they read about the last class. Which musician is credited with founding the blues? What was his song about? Let students know that today they are going to listen to his song again, but this time

JSU - TPS Teaching with Primary Sources

they are going to compare it to a modern group's cover.

TSW compare and contrast two iterations of the same song.

- Guide students through comparing the two songs. Ask:
 - Are the lyrics the same? What instruments do you hear in both versions?
 - How would you describe the feel of each song?

TSW compare the context of two different versions of "Boweavil Blues" by responding to the following question:

- 'You have now listened to two recordings of 'Boweavil Blues' from Charley Patton and the North Mississippi Allstars. Compare and contrast the two recordings. Make note of the overall feeling of the songs, what the singers sound like, and what instruments you hear. Give specific details from the recordings.'

DAY 3: THE IMPACT OF THE BLUES - CITY BLUES (90 MIN.)

TSW compare and contrast the Chicago Blues with the Delta blues. It may look something like this:

Delta Blues	Both	City Blues (Chicago Blues)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Really strong accent ● Only one musician (singer and guitarist are same person) ● Mostly male 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Solo or lead guitar in the background ● Singing about things that have them down ● Very personal - all about personal experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Many musicians (singer, lead guitarist, drummer, etc.) ● A lot of women singers

Closure:

Keep a running blues timeline on the wall. At the end of each lesson have the class work together to fill in the timeline with information they've learned to review the lesson. By the end of the overall lesson it might look like something like this:

1900s	1910s	1920s	1930s	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s
<p><i>Delta Blues</i> The blues develop in the Mississippi Delta. The blues are very personal, which is not entirely new, but much of the black music before now is about morals or stories. Charley Patton, Robert Johnson, and Son House are some of the most prominent blues musicians of the time.</p>			<p><i>Jazz</i> Jazz is born in New Orleans. Originally jazz was mostly dance music, but through the 40s and 50s jazz takes a turn is moreso show tunes and instrumental pieces.</p>			<p><i>Funk</i> Jazz and blues give way to soul and funk.</p>			<p><i>Rap</i> Rap emerges from hip hop and becomes almost synonymous with the genre/</p>	
<p><i>City Blues</i> The blues spread across the country. City blues used more instruments and even backup singers. There are many female singers on the scene such</p>						<p><i>Hip Hop</i> Hip Hop takes over jazz and funk. It focuses heavily on call and response and often addresses many of the</p>				

JSU - TPS Teaching with Primary Sources

as Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey, Mamie Smith, and Koko Taylor.

political, moral, and emotional issues as the blues.

PERFORMANCE TASK - FINAL

Ask each student to pick a hip hop/rap song and compare and contrast their song with one of the four Delta blues songs we listened to on the first day of the lesson. Ask students to address the number of singers, types of instruments, the feel of the songs, and even the contexts.

Independent Practice:

DAY 4: THE IMPACT OF THE BLUES - JAZZ & HIP HOP (90 MIN.)

Ask each student to pick a hip hop/rap song and compare and contrast their song with one of the four Delta blues songs we listened to on the first day of the lesson. Ask students to address the number of singers, types of instruments, the feel of the songs, and even the contexts.

Tier Instruction:

TIER II DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION	TIER III DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION
<p><i>Lesson</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All texts are provided in print and online Students are allowed/encouraged to do performance tasks in pairs if needed <p><i>Day's Per Week</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All classes <p><i>Minutes Per Day</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A 	<p><i>Lesson</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance tasks are done with teacher assistance 1-on-1 or in small groups <p><i>Day's Per Week</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1-2 <p><i>Minutes Per Day</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A

Small Group Instruction:

Monday (DAY 1 & 4)	Tuesday (No Class)	Wednesday (DAY 2)	Thursday (DAY 3)	Friday (No Class)
Students are encouraged to work in pairs to fill out the worksheet together. Some students will work in a small group with teacher.				

This Lesson Plan Includes:

Worksheet: Song Analysis Worksheet

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STUDENT REACTIONS

Overall, it seems that students enjoyed this lesson. There were artists that they connected with a little better than others (which was to be expected). This included Robert Johnson, Son House (a big hit), Koko Taylor (another big hit), and a few others.

They did a very good job analyzing the songs themselves. This included identifying the instruments that they heard as well as identifying the role of back up singers/choirs. They were also quite adept at finding similarities between the different genres that we listened to and connecting each genre back to the Delta Blues, even going so far as to compare specific artists like Bessie Smith and Robert Johnson. They were also able to easily contrast the different genres.

Most importantly, students were able to meet our objectives by analyzing various songs, specifically those from Delta bluesmen, and compare the different genres as they developed from the Delta blues throughout the 1900s.

TEACHER REACTION

I loved this lesson so much because it's really neat to see my kids trace the modern music they listen to each day to its roots right here in the Mississippi Delta. They see how deeply the music coming out of the Delta impacted EVERY BIT of American modern music and it seems that the content definitely connects a little deeper because it becomes personal in a sense.

I will say that it is so important to demonstrate song analysis for them. Specifically to talk through my analysis process out loud so they see what exactly I'm listening for. I understand that this is the whole point of the modeling phase when teaching, but it is so important to do before asking them to do the same as they may not always quite know what to listen out for.

I found that keeping a timeline on the wall in the classroom was a really good tool for mapping out the development of American music from the blues forward and for reviewing and summarizing that day's lesson. It was a very simple timeline that consisted of masking tape and pieces of copy paper, but it was still quite helpful in keeping track of everything we were discussing in class.

I think a great follow up lesson would be to learn about the song structure of the blues (as this lesson focuses on the history and development of the blues). Students could be allowed to use a blues backing track and write their own blues song.