

Unit Overview:

The following lesson plans are situated within a larger curriculum focused on African Diaspora Music and History. The overarching idea is to use African influenced music as a pedagogical vehicle for a critical and creative survey of American history. From West African drum ensembles to early slave spirituals, through the blues and jazz, soul and r + b, and now hip-hop, music has been the backbone of the movement towards truly democratic, multicultural community. This curriculum challenges students to engage with the following questions:

- What is hip-hop, and where did it come from?
- What role does hip-hop play in contemporary American society?
- Throughout American history, what role has black music played? How has it shaped and been shaped by the struggle for survival, justice, and equality?

Lesson Plan: “Hip-Hop and the Blues”

Overview: After this lesson, students will have a fundamental understanding of the blues as a musical form, and of the conditions within which it grew. They will be able to make musicological and socio-cultural connections between blues and hip-hop, and will produce two poems/songs to demonstrate these connections.

Key Questions:

- Introduce these questions to begin the lesson. Emphasize that students should continually refer back to these key themes/questions throughout the unit.
- What conditions were the early bluesmen living in? How did this shape the development of the music?
- Were there blueswomen? Introduce the concept of misogyny. Did women participate actively in the creation of the blues? How were they portrayed in the blues, vs. today in hip-hop?
- What role did the blues play in Delta life? How did the blues shape society? How does this compare to the role hip-hop plays in contemporary urban life?

Key Concepts:

- Create a slideshow of relevant images, and a playlist of representative music. Using the slideshow and music (very low volume) as a backdrop, teach about the

key concepts that provide context for answering the key questions. When you reach a point of central importance, pause the media and have students take notes.

- Post-slavery conditions in the Mississippi Delta
- the bluesman as “secular preacher”
- blues as “release”, as affirmation of life, love, sex, movement, etc. in the face of great adversity
- bluesman and preacher: the voices of the community
- bluesman and preacher: essentially the only two opportunities for young men to make money (make connection to contemporary reality- youth and the entertainment dream)
- blues song structure (12-bar form, A-A-B, rhyming)
- lyrical content (sex, drugs, struggle, identity)
- blues as a geographical expression (regionalism, place specific references and pride)
- Saturday night on Church St.; Saturday night on Beale St. (Saturday night in Brooklyn?)

Group Creation/“Students as Teachers”

After the “lecture”, assign each student one of the following research topics. As individual homework, they will do research that builds upon the information provided during the day’s lecture, and show up to class prepared to contribute something unique and interesting. The following day, they will work in groups to create a brief presentation for the class that reinforces and builds upon the previous days’ teachings.

- Sharecropping
- Segregation/Racism
- Geography/History of the Mississippi Delta
- Famous Bluesmen and their lyrics/style
- Blues as celebratory release.

CREATE!

- Using the AAB, 12-bar form, write *a blues about your community*. Be sure to refer to specific places and neighborhoods, and address some of the struggles and issues young people face in your community.
- Imagine: It is 1923, and you are the son or daughter of a sharecropper in the Delta. Using an instrumental hip-hop beat, *write a rap about your life, your family, and the conditions you live in.*