

Kathy Pauls  
38561 672 Ave.  
Watkins, Minn. 55389

NEH LANDMARKS WORKSHOP  
THE MOST SOUTHERN PLACE ON EARTH

American Music: General Music 7

Origins of the Blues

National Standards for Music Education

- #1 Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music
- #2 Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
- #5 Reading and notating music.
- #6 Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.
- #8 Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.
- #9 Understanding music in relation to our history and culture.

Intro: Listen to “Babysittin’ Blues” from film Adventure in Babysitting. Gets the attention of 7<sup>th</sup> graders in a humorous, age appropriate performance.

Talk about the origin of the blues. Have student discuss knowledge of Slavery and Sharecropping. Give historical background with the help of power point presentation of pictures and lecture of life in the Mississippi Delta during the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Explain to students characteristics of blues: Intensity: emotional, great sincerity, realism with intense involvement. Voice from deep within the body or chest of singer, growling, gravely voice. Strong pulsating rhythm. Minimalist: Pentatonic scale (5 notes) every note important. Bending strings, flexible pitch or wavering & sliding pitch. (worry the notes)

Blues chord progression: I IV V Give example on keyboard or guitar. (Ex. Joe Turner Blues)

Options:

- 1) Listen to recordings of early blues singers. Refer to resource recordings, I tunes or performance on the Internet. Have students recognize instrumentation.
- 2) Write words for your own blues song! Play the blues chord progression I IV V on keyboard. (practice first on paper keyboard/students can mark finger positions) Key of C. Refer to resources for examples.
- 3) Examples of early blues on DVD of “Jazz” Ken Burns, PBS

Vocab words:  
Slavery  
Cotton  
Sharecropper  
segregation  
Mississippi Delta  
field hollers  
call & response  
Jook joints  
Charlie Patton  
W. C. Handy  
Robert Johnson  
Bessie Smith  
BB King  
Aretha Franklin  
Billie Holiday  
“race” records  
riffs  
walking bass  
Great Migration

This is just a skeletal lesson guide. Depending on time, instruments and classroom accommodations these resources are simple guidelines for the teacher. There are many early blues performers to choose, just a limited amount have been listed here. As for vocabulary words and definitions, add or detract to suit your class level and proficiency. Students may use the vocabulary words as a study guide before assessments.

Resources: “Jazz” PBS / Ken Burns Documentary DVD  
NEA “Jazz in the Schools” Book & CD’s  
“Jazz for Young People” Curriculum books & CD’s Jazz at Lincoln Center, Wynton Marsalis  
“Jazz Greats” biographies of early blues and jazz singers. Reproducible pages. Hal Leonard.  
“Give My Poor Heart Ease” William Ferris Book, Cd & DVD  
“Adventures In Babysitting” 1987  
“Blues Brothers” 1980  
“O Brother Where Art Thou” music: Man of Constant Sorrow