



artsNOW

Integrated learning solutions

THE BLUES (OR NOT-SO-BLUE BLUES)

Grade Band: 9-12

Content Focus: Music & Science



LEARNING DESCRIPTION

Using a twelve-bar blues form, students will create music expressing the blues (or “not the blue blues”) about selected subject content.

LEARNING TARGETS

Essential Questions	“I Can” Statements
How can music express feelings and ideas?	I can write lyrics about assigned content using a prescribed form.
How can music and language be combined to express feelings and ideas?	I can play blues harmony.
	I can combine music and language to express feelings and ideas.

GEORGIA STANDARDS

Curriculum Standards	Arts Standards
<i>Non-ELA Standards will vary depending on selected content for blues compositions; thus, standards below are offered as ideas only and are not exclusive.</i>	HSMA.CR.2 Compose and arrange music within specified guidelines.
	HSMA.CR.3 Evaluate and refine musical ideas.

Biology I: SB1 Obtain, evaluate, and communicate information to analyze the nature of the relationships between structures and functions in living cells. Botany: SBO4 Obtain, evaluate, and communicate information to analyze the impact of plant diseases and pests on plant defense systems and agriculture. Earth Systems: SES2 Obtain, evaluate, and communicate information to understand how plate tectonics creates certain geologic features, landforms, Earth materials, and geologic hazards.	HSMA.PR.2 Perform a varied repertoire of music on instruments, alone and with others. HSMA.RE.1 Listen to, analyze, and describe music. HSMA.RE.2 Evaluate music and music performances. HSMA.CN.2 Understand music in relation to history and culture.
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SOUTH CAROLINA STANDARDS

Curriculum Standards	Arts Standards
<i>Non-ELA Standards will vary depending on selected content for blues compositions; thus, standards below are offered as ideas only and are not exclusive.</i> Biology: B-LS2-1. Use mathematical and/or computational representations to support explanations of biotic and abiotic factors that affect carrying capacity of ecosystems at different scales. B-LS4-4. Construct an explanation based on evidence for how natural selection leads to adaptation of populations. Chemistry: C-PS1-5. Apply scientific principles and evidence to provide an explanation about the effects of changing the temperature or concentration of the reacting particles on the rate at which a reaction occurs. Earth and Space Science: E-ESS1-3. Construct an explanation using evidence to explain the ways elements are produced over the life cycle of a star.	Anchor Standard 1: I can arrange and compose music. Anchor Standard 4: I can play instruments alone and with others. Anchor Standard 9: I can relate music to other arts disciplines, other subjects, and career paths.

KEY VOCABULARY

Content Vocabulary	Arts Vocabulary
<i>Non-ELA vocabulary will vary depending on selected content for blues compositions.</i>	• <u>Beat</u> - The pulse underlying music • <u>Blues music</u> - A genre that evolved from folk music of African Americans in the American South (work songs, field hollers, and spirituals) during the late 1800s • <u>Body percussion</u> - Using the body as an instrument; includes patting, clapping, stamping, and snapping • <u>Chord</u> - A combination of three or more pitches played at the same time • <u>Chord progression</u> - A sequence of chords • <u>Form</u> - The organization of a piece (how the music is put together) • <u>Harmony</u> - Two or more pitches sounding simultaneously • <u>Key</u> - The group of pitches (scale) around which a piece of music revolves • <u>Measure</u> - The space between two bar lines • <u>Phrase</u> - Musical sentence

MATERIALS

- Boomwhackers (or other pitched instruments)
- Writing materials (e.g., pencil and paper)
- Recording of blues music (see suggestions below)
- Sound production resources (e.g., speaker and phone)

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

Opening/Activating Strategy

- Using found sound or body percussion, perform a rhythm (or steady beat) for eight beats. Have students echo. Label this rhythm A.
- Using a different found sound or body percussion, perform a different rhythm for eight beats. Have students echo. Compare and contrast with A. Label this rhythm B.
- Tell students they will be creating musical compositions with same and different patterns (A and B).

Work Session

- Play a blues recording and ask students about the mood of the music. Lead them to understand that blues music is often about hardship. Suggested blues pieces are “The Thrill is Gone” (BB King), “One Shoe Blues” (BB King), and “Sweet Home Chicago” (Eric Clapton).
- While many different blues forms exist, this lesson will focus on the twelve-bar blues.
- The twelve-bar blues includes three phrases (lines), each with four measures and chords, thereby yielding twelve bars (measures). Twelve-bar blues uses three chords (I, IV, and V) in the following sequence:

I I I I
IV IV I I
V IV I I

- Display visual of twelve-bar blues (this is one example of twelve-bar blues; other versions also exist). The numbers on the top indicate beats; the roman numerals on the bottom indicate chords.

beats	1-2-3-4	1-2-3-4	1-2-3-4	1-2-3-4
chord	I	I	I	I

beats	1-2-3-4	1-2-3-4	1-2-3-4	1-2-3-4
chord	IV	IV	I	I

beats	1-2-3-4	1-2-3-4	1-2-3-4	1-2-3-4
chord	V	IV	I	I

- Have students keep the steady beat using different body percussion for each chord.
 - For example, students pat the steady beat for the I chord, clap for the IV chord, and snap for the V chord.
- Play the recording and have students perform body percussion to show the chord progression.
- Display visual showing pitches in the I, IV, and V chords.

G	C	D
E	A	B
C	F	G
I	IV	V

- Give each student a boomwhacker and practice playing each chord. Then play the twelve-bar blues, playing four beats for each chord.
 - For example, students playing C, E, and G will play sixteen beats in the first phrase (bar) since there are four I chords in the first phrase.
- Have students listen to the recording to determine the form of the lyrics. (This may take repeated listening.) Lead students to understand the form as A A B (A = first four bars, A is repeated, B = last four bars).
- Listen to the recording to determine the specific content of the lyrics in A and B phrases (bars). Lead students to understand that A presents a problem, followed by A that repeats the problem (sometimes with a slight variation), and B offers a comment on or twist to what has been presented. All bars end with rhyming words.
- Divide students into groups and have them write lyrics for their twelve-bar blues. (If students choose, they may write a “not-so-blue blues”, a celebration rather than a commiseration!) Since each phrase (bar) is sixteen beats long, the lyrics should present

the problem (A) and reflection (B) succinctly and include rhyming words at the end of each bar!

- Lyrics content can be aligned with subject matter content. For example, groups could write blues (or not-so-blue blues) about the cell membrane, cytoplasm, and nucleus.
- Have groups share their blues (or not-so-blues) compositions (speaking or singing) while other students play the chord progression. Other students listen and assess the group's adherence to the prescribed musical and lyrical form.
 - For example, were the lyrics in A A B form? Did A present the problem and B respond to it? Did each bar end with rhyming words? Was the chord progression a twelve-bar blues?

Closing/Reflection

- Question students about lesson content, including music and content area vocabulary and understanding.
- Have students compare and contrast blues with the music to which they typically listen.

ASSESSMENTS

Formative

- Through observing and questioning, assess students' understanding of the twelve-bar blues harmony and lyrics.
- Through observing, assess students' ability to play a steady beat using body percussion and boomwhackers.
- Through observing, assess students' understanding of academic content while writing lyrics.

Summative

- Students write and share lyrics reflecting assigned content in prescribed form.
- Students play the twelve-bar blues.

DIFFERENTIATION

Accelerated:

- Students explore a different blues form.
- Students write additional blues lyrics using the same form.
- Students play two boomwhackers.
- Students create a rhythm for the chord progression (rather than playing the steady beat).

Remedial:

- For a student having difficulty playing a steady beat, another student with beat proficiency could model the steady beat in front of or beside the student.
- For a student having difficulty playing the boomwhacker at the right time, track the chords on a visual, point to the student (or have another student point to the student) to cue playing the boomwhacker, or pair the student with another student playing the same boomwhacker pitch.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Websites for information on blues:

- <https://kids.britannica.com/kids/article/blues/352eight6eight>
- <https://www.pbs.org/theblues/classroom/essaysblues.html>

- https://www-tc.pbs.org/theblues/classroom/downloads/teacher_guide.pdf (This is a particularly robust website with an extensive resource; good for grades 6-twelve.)

This integrated lesson provides differentiated ideas and activities for educators that are aligned to a sampling of standards. Standards referenced at the time of publishing may differ based on each state's adoption of new standards.

Ideas contributed by: Dr. Maribeth Yoder-White

Revised and copyright: May 2025 @ ArtsNOW