



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1997 Volume V: The Blues Impulse

How to Blues

Guide for Curriculum Unit 97.05.03
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Students broaden their understanding of African American culture through a study of the history, philosophy, and performers of the blues, as well as participate in related musical activities. An emphasis is on the role of improvisation, an important factor in this unique African American music and poetry art form, first heard around the turn of the century.

For the first ten objectives, students read the history and practices of African and African American music. After each group reading, they participate in musical activities which include the singing and accompanying of African songs, African American spirituals, and work songs with African type instruments, and listening to, playing, and singing the blues. The eleventh objective is a description of the basic curriculum for playing the C, F and G chords on small electronic keyboards for the musical accompaniment. Students write and sing their own blues verses as a final project.

The blues that are studied include the classic tradition with Bessie Smith and Louis Armstrong, the country blues with Blind Lemon Jefferson, the popular blues singer Leadbelly, and the Chicago and urban blues with Muddy Waters and B.B. King. The relationship of blues to jazz is shown in the compositions "West End Blues" by Louis Armstrong, and "C Jam Blues" by Duke Ellington.

(Recommended for Music, grades 4-8)

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