

Museum of Contemporary Photography Curriculum Development Project
Funded by the Terra Foundation for American Art

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LESSON TITLE

The Great Migration and Blues Music: Mood and Focus

GRADE LEVELS

What grade level(s) is this lesson most appropriate for?

This lesson was constructed for a 5th grade class but can be adapted for other grades.

NUMBER OF INSTRUCTIONAL MINUTES

How many instructional minutes will it take to complete this lesson?

Variable depending on the number of content areas engaged. This lesson was implemented as part of a cross curricular lesson with the fifth grade social studies class about The Great Migration, which required approximately 180 instructional minutes (3 music class periods, and at least one social studies period).

It could also be used by English Language Arts and social science classes who create writing inspired by the blues and the Great Migration without composing music.

OVERARCHING THEME

Identify a topic or recurring idea that drives the focus of the lesson.

Historic photographs can help visualize the mood of a song from a particular era and deepen our understanding of historic events. The Blues is an important part of American history. It has its origins in slavery when African Americans sang songs to express how they were feeling in a repressive environment and relates to the history of the Great Migration of African-Americans from south to north.

CONTENT FOCUS

Provide a 1-2 paragraph summary about your lesson. Summary must include the following:

- *A thorough description of the lesson topic that includes background information*
- *A brief discussion of skills covered that are aligned to the Common Core State Standards*
- *An brief explanation about the learning activities that the students will engage in throughout the lesson*

We can learn about the history of a culture by studying photographs and music of an era. Blues music is a reflection of several eras in American history. It references the roots of American slavery and the progression of the integration of African American music into mainstream American society. The Blues is the foundation of all American popular music. It later evolves into jazz, classic rock and then all the other forms of rock and pop music that most Americans are familiar with such as funk, soul, punk,

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psychedelic, R & B and heavy metal and rap. The movement of African Americans from the South to Northern cities from roughly 1915-1970 in what came to be known as the Great Migration contributed to the spread and influence of African-American culture including blues music.

Students will learn about this history of the Great Migration and Blues music, by examining historic photographs of the Jim Crow South by Dorothea Lange, and listening to blues music. They will write a one page first person narrative based on a character in Lange's imagery. Music students can write blues lyrics and compose a simple blues accompaniment.

ART ANALYSIS

Artist 1: Dorothea Lange

1. *Turpentine Worker's Family Near Cordele, Alabama, 1936.* 2007_93.jpg
2. *Children of a Turpentine Worker near Cordele, Alabama. The Father earns one Dollar a Day, July 1936*
(these two photographs show the same family)
3. *Yazoo Delta, Mississippi, Nowhere are ante bellum conditions so nearly preserved as in the Yazoo (Mississippi) Delta, August 1938.*

Dorothea Lange used photography to document and raise awareness of the plight of African-Americans share-croppers in the American South during the Great Depression while she worked for the Farm Security Administration. The poor living and working conditions shown in these images and a culture of bigotry and discrimination caused many African Americans to travel north in search of a better life during the Great Migration and were the subject of some blues music.



1.

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2.



3.

Artist 2: Early Blues musicians, including Muddy Waters (aka McKinley Morganfield)

Muddy Waters is a blues musician who in 1943 made the migration north and influenced the spread and development of Blues music. Listen to early blues recordings such as Muddy Waters “I Be’s Troubled.”

Lesson Goal(s)

Identify one or more goals (e.g., content standards, course, or program objectives, and learning outcomes) that the unit targets. What will our students know and be able to do at the end of the unit?

By the end of this lesson, students will gain skills closely reading photographs and music related to the Great Migration and will contextualize those works with historic information.

Students will write a first person narrative that reflects the content and mood of the photograph.

Music students will learn to play easy rhythmic patterns and chordal patterns on classroom instruments using whole, half, quarter and 8th note rhythms (Chicago Guide for Teaching and Learning in the Arts, IL 26B).

Enduring Understandings

Ideas that are at the core of the subject and require inquiry.

Music and photographs can record history and impact the way we understand a historical event.

Details in a photograph or piece of music help convey meaning and set a mood.

Questions for Exploration: *What questions will help students to get to the core of the subject?*

- How do pictures tell stories? How do choices made by a photographer influence how a story is told?
- How can a story be told through music?
- How can choices made by a musician influence how a story is told?
- How can learning more about the context in which an image or song is made help us better understand that work?

Knowledge : *List of key concepts that learners will understand by the end of this lesson.*

- Photographs and music can help record and tell the stories of an era.
- Details in a photograph or work of music reveal narrative and mood.
- The Great Migration helped spread African-American culture including Blues music.

Processes :

Lesson 1: Background on the Great Migration and Blues Music (classroom teacher will cover this in social studies class)

- What factors caused many African-Americans to move from South to North during the Great Migration? Why is this an important era of American History?
- What are the origins of Blues music? What is typically expressed in Blues music? What impact has Blues music had on American culture?

Listen to early blues recordings such as Muddy Waters “I Be’s Troubled.” Make notes as you listen.

- What do you notice about how the music sounds?
- What do you notice about the lyrics? What is expressed? How?
- What do you notice about how the song is structured?

Lesson II: Close Reading: Dorothea Lange

1. *Turpentine Worker's Family Near Cordele, Alabama, 1936. 2007_93.jpg*
2. *Children of a Turpentine Worker near Cordele, Alabama. The Father earns one Dollar a Day, July 1936*
(these two photographs show the same family)

3. *Yazoo Delta, Mississippi, Nowhere are ante bellum conditions so nearly preserved as in the Yazoo (Mississippi) Delta, August 1938.*

Look carefully at each image. Write down lists of words in response to each question

- What do you see or notice?
- What do you learn about the people in this picture? How? What do we learn from the titles?
- What did Lange chose to show us? Why do you think she made those choices?
- What is the mood or feeling of the picture? How is that communicated?
- How do you think these moods would sound musically?
- What do you think the people in this picture might say if we could hear their voices?
- How does what you see in this picture connect to what you have learned about the history of the Great Migration and Blues music?

Lesson III Blues Inspired Narrative Writing

Blues songs express feelings or tell a story, often a story of struggle or hardship, from one person's point of view. Consider the blues music you have listened to—the moods, feelings, and thoughts that were expressed. Consider what you have learned about some of living and working conditions for African Americans in the South in the early-mid 20th century and what you observed in Dorothea Lange's photographs. Select one of the subjects pictured in Lange's photographs who stands out to you.

- What do you think that person might be feeling or thinking about?
- What might they hope for if they were to consider leaving his place? Write down your thoughts.

Write a one-page narrative from the point of view of the subject you have selected evoking the mood and spirit of blues music. Revise and then share your text.

(Option for music students)

Basic phrases are repeated in blues songs which are often structured in an AAB format.

*to learn more about the structure of Blues music see here:

<http://www.pbs.org/theblues/classroom/intlyrics.html>

Music students who are spending more time on writing and performing music could use the below structure to compose blues lyrics. (because instructional time is 60 minutes per week)

Example:

Verse 1:

A new life a new _____

I don't know how _____

It feels like _____

But I know that _____

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Chorus:

I'm gonna keep goin' no matter what

I've got no choice but to try

It's hard to change when you don't know how

But I'll _____

B. Put the above lyrics to a Blues progression harmonic structure (tonic, dominant, subdominant key of F) with keyboards and hand percussion instruments.

- Ask students: how does the music change what the picture is conveying? Can we change what the picture is conveying by changing the music?

C. Extension: Using the song writing process, have the students create lyrics, using the sentence stems, about how they feel about school or another school related topic.

References:

Use the Great Migration text of your choice or this:

http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories_events_migration.html

Use the Blues history text of your choice or this:

<http://www.pbs.org/theblues/classroom/essaysblues.html>

Music Alive: Exploring the Blues Teacher Handbook:

http://www.floridamemory.com/OnlineClassroom/zora_hurston/

Learn about the work of Dorothea Lange:

Elizabeth Partridge, *Restless Spirit: The Life and Work of Dorothea Lange*, 1998

Common Core State Standards

Learning goals that outline what a student should know and be able to do at the end of each grade that are research-and evidence-based, clear, understandable, consistent, and based on rigorous content and application of knowledge through higher-order thinking skills.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

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*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.