

Objective

- Introduction to the blues through student reading and listening example

Materials

- **PowerPoint:** Lesson 4 - *Blues* page 12
- **JAZZ CLUB Listening Example:** *Back Water Blues* page 13
- **Student Worksheet:** Lesson 4 - *Lesson and Listening Assessments* page 14

I. PowerPoint Blues

1. Show the students PowerPoint Lesson 4 and have students take turns reading the slides.
2. Have students complete the Lesson ASSESSMENT individually or as a class.

The blues, like jazz, first appeared about 1900. The blues is often considered a style of jazz. Blues songs were often sad and **melancholy** unlike Dixieland jazz, which was happy and fun. The tempo of early blues songs usually ranged from **andante** (slow) to **moderato** (medium) and the **meter** was frequently 4/4.

The words of blues songs followed a formula. Notice that **phrases** one and two are the same.

Phrase 1. Well I'm going to Chicago. The windy city here I come.

Phrase 2. Well I'm going to Chicago. The windy city here I come.

Phrase 3. I'm hoppin' on a freight train, headin' straight into town.

Blues melodies used certain **pitches** to create the sad mood. The mood was created with a musical **scale** called the "minor blues scale". Different **scales** produce different moods. For example, the **pitches** G A B C D E F# G make up the major **scale**, which was used to create a happy mood.

The minor blues **scale** (G B^b C D^b D F G) creates sad or **melancholy** melodies. The name "blues" described the **melancholy** words as well as the melodies.

major scale: G A B C D E F# G

minor blues scale: G B^b C D^b D F G

W.C. Handy, known as the Father of the Blues, was the most famous early blues composer and performer. Unlike the majority of early blues musicians, W. C. Handy could read and write music. His blues music spread rapidly because anyone could buy the sheet music and play the songs.

ANSWER KEY Student Reading Lesson ASSESSMENT

1. The blues can be considered a style of _____. (*Jazz*)
2. The tempos of blues pieces ranged from _____ to _____.
(*Andante [slow]*) (*Moderato [medium]*)
3. Who is known as the "Father of the Blues?" (*W. C. Handy*)
4. How was the mood of most blues songs different from the mood of Dixieland jazz?
(*Blues was sad and melancholy and Dixieland was happy and fun.*)
5. Name a scale used to create melancholy melodies. (*Minor blues scale*)
6. About what year did blues first appear? (*1900*)

II. JAZZ CLUB Listening Example

Title: "Back Water Blues"

Composer: Bessie Smith

Performer: Bessie Smith and James P. Johnson

available on: *Bessie Smith The Complete Recordings, Vol. 3* (Columbia/Legacy C2K 47474)

YouTube www.youtube.com/watch?v=mRTHHkeQ8sE [3:17 Process/Assessment below]

iTunes Ken Burns "Jazz" CD 1 track 7 [Process/Assessment below]

Suggested YouTube Search Back Water Blues, Bessie Smith

[1st video - other choices: 3, any video with Bessie Smith & James P. Johnson]

SUGGESTED TEACHING PROCESS JAZZ CLUB Listening:

1. Explain that this blues is an excellent example of the phrase structure of the early blues style. (Phrases 1 and 2 are the same, phrase 3 is different for each verse.)
2. Students practice conducting slow, medium or fast tempi in 2/4, 3/4, and 4/4 meters.
3. Discuss sliding to the pitch. Explain that Bessie Smith often uses this technique.
4. Explain that James P. Johnson was one of the greatest boogie-woogie pianists of all time (style of blues with a rolling ostinato pattern played with the left hand).
5. Instruct students to listen for the instrument(s), tempo, meter, mood and style.
6. Play recording while conducting a moderato tempo in a 4/4 meter.
Video locations: 0:00 boogie-woogie piano, 0:05 verse 1, 0:32 verse 2, 1:00 verse 3, 1:29 verse 4 new left hand pattern, 1:54 verse 5 left hand "walking bass," 2:22 verse 6, 2:49 verse 7 (walking bass is a 4/4 quarter note pattern played with the left hand)
7. Have students complete the Listening ASSESSMENT individually or as a class.

ANSWER KEY JAZZ CLUB Listening ASSESSMENT

1. Identify the instruments you hear. (2) (*Voice - Bessie Smith and piano - James P. Johnson*)
2. James P. Johnson was one of the greatest _____ - _____ style pianists. (*boogie-woogie*)
3. True or False: Bessie Smith's singing style included sliding to the pitch. (*True*)
4. Determine the tempo and the meter. (*Medium [moderato], 4/4 [12/8]*)
5. Describe the mood of the song. (*Melancholy*)
6. Name the style of this piece. (*Blues*)

Related Activity Blues Cats Recorder Songbook

TOM CAT BLUES Pages 30-34

- Recorder/vocal song G A B C'
- 12/8 slow blues style
- *Performance and Accompaniment* CD tracks

