



New Harmonies: Celebrating American Roots Music

**Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service and
Mississippi Humanities Council**

DIGGING UP ROOTS...

Lesson Plans: Suggested Grades 4-7

Lesson Objectives:

Students will:

- Identify different roots music genres.
- Research the history and key roots music musicians from Mississippi.
- "Produce" a TV show representing their artists.

Time Frame: 3 hours; two class periods

Curriculum Standards for Social Studies (National Council for Social Studies) Standard 1: *Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.*

Mississippi Social Studies Framework: www.mde.k12.ms.us

Social Studies, 4th grade:

Competency 1. d.

Competency 3. a.

Competency 5. b.

Social Studies, 6th grade:

Competency 2. b.

Visual & Performing Arts, 4th grade:

Competency 1. c., e., f.

Competency 2. c., d.

Competency 4. c.

Competency 6. a., b.

Visual & Performing Arts, 5th - 8th:

Competency 1. c.

Supplies:

- **Internet, books in library, other resources available to class**
- **Blackboard or overhead projector**
- **Mississippi STARS Map (multiple choice game)**
- **Microphone to simulate a TV station**
- **Musical instruments: Bring from home or make their own...**For example cutting the ends of straws in a "V" shape, flattening them and then blowing hard will produce interesting sounds. Experiment with the length of straws.

Try rubber band guitars. Use a sturdy box with a lid. Cut a circle in the top for the sound hole. Stretch rubber bands, or elastic (e.g. hat elastic) around the box and lift elastic up off the box with pencils at each end to avoid buzzing.

Try a prayer drum or ape drum:

Cut the ends off 2 balloons. Stretch them over 2 large coffee lids. Tape a pencil to the back of one, to act as a handle. Attach a string to the pencil and on each end of the string, place a small bead. (Make sure the bead is placed in the right spot, so that when it swings around, it will hit the balloon). Attach the 2 coffee lids together with tape, enclosing the pencil. Put pencil between palms and rub together. The string and beads should swing around to hit the balloons on either side, producing a great sound.

- **Costumes: Bring from home, borrow from drama teacher, etc.**

Background for teachers: American roots or folk music is the music created by ordinary Americans who sing or play instruments in the course of their everyday lives. The term was once used primarily to describe music of white, rural Southerners, but has now been expanded to include the musical traditions of other ethnic groups as well. See all lesson plans for more details about roots music.

Setting the stage:

- **Display pictures of famous Mississippi roots music artists and a large map of Mississippi.**

Lesson Procedure:

1. Divide class into six groups, and assign each one of the styles from the initial class activity. Using all available materials, each group researches their

assigned type of music to discover the answers to the following questions (written on the board or overhead projector for easier student access):

- When and where did this style develop? (**research its connection to the time and place from which it came**)
 - Who are the major figures (songwriters, performers, bands, etc.) of this style?
 - Are any of them from Mississippi?
2. Each group then begins to plan a mock TV show exploring the history of their assigned style of music. Each group may choose two recordings for the show (one general representation of the style and one artist from Mississippi).
 3. Over the course of the show, music selections should be prefaced with spoken introductions addressing the information from the research questions.
 4. Before the end of class, groups should divide responsibilities for finding and bringing in the recordings, costumes, instruments, etc.
 5. The group uses lip-sync, instruments, and costumes to portray their genre.
 6. Groups compile and "produce" their TV show (choose a name for the "variety show," select a host, etc.).

Extended Learning:

Compose and perform your own song (music and lyrics) in one of the music styles explored in the class activity. Keep in mind the defining features of this style when creating your song.