



New Harmonies: Celebrating American Roots Music

Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service and
Mississippi Humanities Council

TRACING OUR ROOTS

Lesson Plans: Suggested Grades 4-7

Lesson Objectives:

- Students will listen to and describe roots music.
- Students will identify and sketch major elements that define American roots music.

Time Frame: 2 hours

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, 4 th grade:	Competency 1. d. Competency 3. a., h. Competency 5. b.
Social Studies, 6 th grade:	Competency 2. b.
Visual & Performing Arts, 4 th grade:	Competency 1. c., e., f. Competency 2. c., d. Competency 4. c. Competency 6. a., b.
Visual & Performing Arts, 5 th - 8 th :	Competency 1. c. Competency 2. b. Competency 6. a., b., d.
Language Arts, 4 th - 8 th grades	Competency 3. f.

Supplies:

1. Examples of various genres of American Roots Music:

- Bluegrass:

(<http://main.losthighwayrecords.com/artist.aspx?src=obrothersoundtrack.com&aid=193>) (O Brother, Where Art Thou? Movie soundtrack... "I am a Man of

Constant Sorrow") or <http://www.pbs.org/riverofsong/artists/e2-bob-av.html>

- Native American: <http://www.pbs.org/riverofsong/artists/e1-chippewa-av.html>
 - Folk: <http://www.rhapsody.com/peteseeger/ifihadahammersongsofhopeandstruggle> and
 - Gospel: <http://www.pbs.org/riverofsong/artists/e3-mississippi-av.html>
 - Blues: <http://www.pbs.org/riverofsong/artists/e3-robert-av.html> and Blues Shuffle (dance):
<http://www.pbs.org/riverofsong/teachers/ext3.html#Gospel>
 - Cajun: <http://www.pbs.org/riverofsong/artists/e4-dl-av.html>
 - Zydeco: <http://www.pbs.org/riverofsong/artists/e4-geno-av.html>
 - Polka: <http://www.pbs.org/riverofsong/artists/e1-karl-av.html>
- Large pieces of paper (about 3' x 5')
 - Variety of colored markers,
 - Overhead projector or chalkboard
 - Listening guide worksheet

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:

- As students enter the room, play the songs listed above from the internet. Write on the blackboard... You can learn more about people by listening to their songs than any other way, for into the songs go all the hopes and hurts, the angers, fears, and the wants and aspirations." ~ John Steinbeck

Lesson Procedure:

1. Ask students to write on the board the names of the different genres of music that they have heard as they entered the class.
2. Divide the students into six groups and assign each group one of the genres. Ask the students to complete the Listening Guide (see bottom of lesson plan) for their genre. Each group will compile a list of adjectives

describing this music, and write the adjectives on the large piece of poster paper using a variety of colored markers, fonts, sizes (like graffiti).

3. Ask each group to draw a picture that represents their genre. They should get an idea of what the music represents and draw what the music makes them think of.
4. Allow each group to share and explain their poster with the drawing and adjectives.

Extended Learning: For extra credit in art or music class, each student will design a CD album cover for their favorite roots music song or artist.

Listening Guide



1. What instruments do you hear?
2. Describe the singers' vocal style.
3. What region of the U.S. do you think this song comes from? Why?
4. Who do you think the audience would be of this piece of music?
5. What is the subject of this song?
6. What does the music sound like?
7. What images does it bring to mind?
8. In what setting do you imagine this music is best listened to, and why?