

ROCK, RAP, RELIGIOUS, ROOTS-----ROOTS????

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- Develop an accurate description of *American roots music* by analyzing information from the *NEW HARMONIES* exhibit and optional musical snippets provided by the teacher;
- Recognize various types of musical genres classified as roots music and artists who perform them, with emphasis on those with Mississippi connections;
- Recognize the contributions of diverse cultural groups to American roots music; and
- Analyze a piece of *roots music* to show how songs can teach about culture.

SUGGESTED GRADE LEVEL: 8-12

TIME FRAME

Two-three 50 minute class periods

CURRICULUM STANDARDS FOR SOCIAL STUDIES

I. National Council for the Social Studies

Standard 1: *Culture*

Social studies programs should include experience that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.

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

U.S. History, 8th Grade: Competency 3

World Geography: Competency 2

Mississippi Studies: Competency 6

U.S. History: Competency 3

World History: Competency 3

Sociology: Competencies 2 and 5

Minority Studies: Competencies 2 and 3

Humanities II: Competencies 3 and 6

SUPPLIES

- Teacher-made recording of songs/artists to illustrate objective 1 (optional)
- Teacher-made transparency of songs/artists (# 5 of lesson procedures)
- Butcher Paper; markers

BACKGROUND FOR TEACHERS

The term, *roots music* covers a broad range of musical sounds and styles, reflects essential American values, tells the story of our history, and enables the voices of both Native Americans and those transplanted to our country to be heard. It “tells who we are.” In this lesson students will explore the many facets of *roots music* in order to write, vocalize, and understand this elemental musical form.

SETTING THE STAGE

Lead students to discuss the types of music they enjoy: rock, rap, religious, country, classical, etc. Have them brainstorm the reasons why certain kinds of music “speak” more to them than other kinds do. Ask them to begin thinking of how music can tell our stories and reveal distinctive aspects of our cultural identity. Provide an opportunity for them to share specific examples with the class. Ask why *American roots music* was not mentioned in the above discussion. Tell students that the lesson will help them explore this popular music category which “speaks” volumes about who we are.

LESSON PROCEDURES

1. Assist students in developing an understanding of what is meant by the term, *American roots music*. Have them individually list specific characteristics of roots music they can identify in these quotes from the exhibit. (Teacher can read the quotes or project them to a screen or board.)

- a. American roots music is at the center of this country’s soul. (Bonnie Raitt)
- b. American roots music, with its variety of sounds and styles and its centuries-old tradition, acts as this nation’s cultural soundtrack.
- c. Rising out of America’s story, the music reflects essential American values ...
- d. [The music] often is the connecting force between the immigrant experience and the process of ‘becoming an American.’
- e. Roots music carries in its songs many of our country’s cultural emblems—and a good bit of our history, too.

In small groups, students will discuss their responses and will reach consensus on several descriptors to share with the class. Teacher will write these on the board or overhead transparency as students make a new list in their notebooks. Teacher should determine that all particularly descriptive characteristics have been mentioned by the students.

2. Students should now be able to write a first draft identification of *American roots music*.

3. Have the students draw a chart in their notebook (or provide one for them), using the following musical genres as headings: WESTERNS; SPIRITUALS; BLUES; GOSPEL; COUNTRY; BLUEGRASS; FOLK; PROTEST; NATIVE AMERICAN.

4. Based on what they know at this point, ask students if they can associate any of these types of music with the characteristics already noted. Lead them to be as specific as possible in their discussion. Then say: *If I told you that American roots music also refers to a broad range of musical styles such as those named on your chart, would that be a reasonable assumption? Can you support your answer?*

5. Make a transparency of the song titles and artists noted below. Lead students to connect various songs and artists with a particular musical type by placing the following under the appropriate heading on their chart. If possible, teacher could play portions of several of the songs as the activity progresses. (Please indicate those musicians from Mississippi: b, c, f, o)

- | | |
|---|---|
| a. "Swing low, sweet chariot" (spiritual) | h. "Back in the Saddle Again," Gene Autry |
| b. "Crossroad Blues," Robert Johnson | i. "We Shall Overcome" (multiple authors) |
| c. "In the Jailhouse Now," Jimmie Rodgers | j. "Will the Circle be Unbroken?" (variously attributed to Fanny J. Crosby and A.P. Carter) |
| d. "Your Cheating Heart," Hank Williams | k. songs from <i>O Brother, Where Art Thou?</i> |
| e. "If I had a Hammer," Pete Seeger | l. "Blowin' in the Wind," Bob Dylan |
| f. "The Thrill is Gone," B.B. King | m. "Peace in the Valley," Thomas Dorsey |
| g. "Move on Up a Little Higher," by Mahalia Jackson | n. "Wakan Tanka" (Great Spirit), traditional |
| | o. "Down South Blues," Muddy Waters |

Encourage students to add to their initial lists additional characteristics of roots music that they may have identified from this activity.

6. Lead students to discuss other examples they may know of these different types of music and to add them to their charts. Tell them to be prepared to write a more accurate definition of *American roots music*.

7. Students should have already realized the contributions of two immigrant groups to American roots music: Anglo-Europeans and West Africans. It might be possible at this point for students to speculate on particular European and African traditions of content, rhythm, instruments, and style that have helped shape American roots music. Ask students to name other culture groups who are also adding their unique styles to the mix.

8. Divide the class into small groups and assign each group a piece of roots music. Students will "discover" the cultural stories and histories in the lyrics and will also connect the song to the list of characteristics of roots music. Each student will re-write, in his own words, the story of the song. The group should discuss how their song teaches about culture.

9. Conclude the lesson by asking students to use their notes to create a comprehensive identification of *American roots music*. They should also discuss how their group's song reflects their identification.

STUDENT PRODUCT

Instruct the same groups to prepare a large, colorful collage which includes the lyrics of their song and to add drawings, captions, and information to illustrate how it fits the definition of *American roots music*.

EXTENSIONS

1. Using various web sites, students will identify artists from Mississippi who would be classified as roots musicians. Have them prepare a large visual indicating the artist, examples of song titles, and the musical genre represented.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_roots_music. It has several links to state and local musicians.

<http://shs.starkville.k12.ms.us/mswm/MSWritersAndMusicians/music.html>

<http://www.arts.state.ms.us/crossroads/resources.html>

<http://msmusic.org> (website of Mississippi Musicians Hall of Fame has available a book and CD entitled "Legendary Musicians Whose Art has Changed the World." Also grade 4 and 9 lesson plans.

2. Students might enjoy listening to roots music line-up offered by Mississippi Public Broadcasting on Saturdays.

<i>Thacker Mountain Radio</i>	7 - 8 P.M.
<i>Grassroots</i>	8 - 10 P. M.
<i>Highway 61 Blues</i>	10 - 11 P.M.
<i>American Routes</i>	11 P.M. - 1 A.M.
<i>Blues Quest</i>	1 - 2 A.M.