



TEACHER'S GUIDE:

**BLUES - THE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE,
MUSIC THAT CROSSES CULTURES**

WITH KEVIN BURT & HAL REED

A-4; 11:49 MIN

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of the video, “Blues - The Universal Language, Music that Crosses Cultures,” the students will be able to:

- 1.** A. Identify one of the earlier forms of blues music.
B. Explain how it met the needs of the people who played and sang it.
- 2.** Describe how blues music evolved and influenced other genres of music.
- 3.** Describe some contributions of other cultures to blues music.



1. A. IDENTIFY ONE OF THE EARLIER FORMS OF BLUES MUSIC.

Video:

Spirituals, somewhere in-between blues and gospel music.

Additional Learning

"Hailed as a valuable cultural expression, these spirituals account for almost all the transcribed examples of African-American rural music before the dawn of recording, which has created the widespread impression that the slaves sang far more religious than secular songs." (Wald, p. 223)

"...(spirituals were) noble and epic..." (Lomax, p. 47)

"...spirituals, locally called "hallies" (short for hallelujah)-those most beautiful of religious songs..." (Lomax, p. 72)

References

Lomax, A. (1993). *The Land Where the Blues Began*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books, a division of Random House, Inc.

Wald, E. (2004). *Escaping the Delta*. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers Inc.

1. B. EXPLAIN HOW IT MET THE NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE WHO PLAYED AND SANG IT.

Video:

To keep people's spirits up in the darkest of times, to give them a good feeling; blues is a universal language that crosses cultures to reach out to everybody (brings people together).

Additional Learning

"It had produced a soul-cleansing and sustaining black religious tradition, replete with the noble spirituals that soared round the world." (Lomax, p. 259)

"For every task of river, field, then railroad and construction camp, this habit of singing and working together in rhythm had brought forth a packet of catchy tunes that made the work go merrily in spite of the heat." (Lomax, p. 259)

"Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote, 'Music is the universal language of mankind.' Scientists at Harvard ((Samuel Mehr et.al.) have just published the most comprehensive scientific study to date on music as a cultural product, which supports the American poet's pronouncement and examines what features of song tend to be shared across societies." (The Harvard Gazette, November 21, 2019)

"Music is, in fact, universal," the (Harvard) study concludes. "It exists in every society (both with and without words), varies more within than between societies, regularly supports certain types of behavior, and has acoustic features that are systematically related to the goals and responses of singers and listeners." (Classic FM, News-Music, 1-9-2020, by Helena Asprou, Journalist)

"(According to the Harvard study), Music does appear to be tied to specific perceptual, cognitive, and affective faculties, including language (all societies put words to their songs), motor control (people in all societies dance), auditory analysis (all musical systems have signatures of tonality) and aesthetics (their melodies and rhythms are balanced between monotony and chaos)." (Classic FM, News-Music, 1-9-2020, by Helena Asprou, Journalist)

"They (scientists at Harvard) found that, across societies, music is associated with behaviors such as infant care, healing, dance, and love (among many others, like mourning, warfare, processions, and ritual). Examining lullabies, healing songs, dance songs, and love songs in particular, they discovered that songs that share behavioral functions tend to have similar musical features. (The Harvard Gazette, November 21, 2019)

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Lomax, A. (1993). *The Land Where the Blues Began*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books, a division of Random House, Inc.
Wald, E. (2004). *Escaping the Delta*. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers Inc.

2. DESCRIBE HOW BLUES MUSIC EVOLVED AND INFLUENCED OTHER GENRES OF MUSIC.

Video:

People came from other countries to America and shared their music. (The music evolved as influences from different cultures blended together.) You can hear the influence of blues music in what we now consider to be popular music, rock 'n roll, classic rock, jazz, and country music.

Additional Learning

"Times and styles change, among vernacular country players as well as among trendy urbanites, and this was particularly true in this period, due to the arrival of the phonograph. For some twenty years before rural Southern artists or black players of almost any kind began to be recorded, such artists could sit at home and listen to Caruso, John Phillip Sousa, Al Jolson, and a lot of minstrel comedy..." (Wald, p. 46)

"...rural African-Americans in the Deep South were consumers and fans of pop music coming to them from the cities." (Wald, p. 72)

"Sometime in the early twentieth century, a group of Delta guitarists took a dramatic turn toward a tougher-sounding, more rhythm-oriented approach... The proximity to New Orleans, and hence to the Caribbean, was likely a contributing factor..." (Wald, p. 157)

"It had transformed the rather stiff amusements of Western Europe's country dance tradition into the peppery southeastern Virginia reel and invigorated the choicest Scots and Irish tunes with black syncopations; in which, as in the popular dances of Latin America, the black slave could hear that his audible presence had become a joyous essential in his social surround." (Lomax, p.259)

"...the fiddle was by far the most common and popular instrument among Southern musicians, regardless of race, and older white musicians have regularly credited tunes and styles to black players. Whether or not their reproductions of such (fiddle) pieces exactly duplicate the way their black forebears played, they provide a glimpse of an extremely vibrant African-American hoedown tradition..." (Wald, p. 47)

"The bulk of Southern fiddling sounds quite unlike anything to be found in either Europe or Africa, and that can be laid squarely on the pressures and inspiration that the black and white musical traditions exercised on each other." (Wald, p. 49)

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Lomax, A. (1993). *The Land Where the Blues Began*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books, a division of Random House, Inc.

Wald, E. (2004). *Escaping the Delta*. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers Inc.

3. DESCRIBE SOME CONTRIBUTIONS OF OTHER CULTURES TO BLUES MUSIC.

Video:

Music evolved from rhythms from Africa and South America, melody lines and instrumentation from Europe.

Answers to Multiple Choice Quiz:

1. C 2. A 3. C 4. B

Additional Learning

"I hold that music and culture are interconnected, in fact that music is a communication about, a mirror of culture." (Lomax, p.354)

"...the most important thing is a certain tonal feel created by the use of "blue notes" (in technical terms, the flatted third and seventh notes of the major scale). Such notes are common in many earlier African and African-American styles, as well as in quite a few other musics around the world, and they are usually described by Europeans and Euro-Americans as having a mournful, lonesome, minor-key sound." (Wald, p. 5)

"Black Southerners had a deep tradition of private and communal singing, much of it with roots reaching back to Africa. Histories of blues frequently begin with a discussion of this music, the "work songs," "moans," and "field hollers," and treat the commercial blues compositions as an outgrowth of this folk tradition, the natural extension of a shared cultural heritage.... These ancient, intricate singing techniques gave blues music the flavor that Robert Palmer explored in his influential book Deep Blues, and are often regarded as its most distinctive and emotionally powerful characteristic." (Wald, p. 71)

"There is also the 'fife and drum' music of the east Mississippi hill country, which takes its name and basic instruments from military bands, but sounds as purely African as anything in the United States. While this music is quite different from anything we call Delta blues, a lot of the Delta pioneers came out of these hills, so it is certainly relevant." (Wald, p. 157)

References

Lomax, A. (1993). *The Land Where the Blues Began*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books, a division of Random House, Inc.

Wald, E. (2004). *Escaping the Delta*. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers Inc.

QUIZ – MULTIPLE CHOICE

For a Google Form version of this quiz, go to:
[MVBS.org/Teacher-Resources](https://www.mvbs.org/Teacher-Resources)

1. What is one of the earlier forms of blues music?

- a. Rap
- b. Rock ‘n Roll
- c. Spirituals

2. How did it meet the needs of the people who played and sang it?

- a. Kept people’s spirits up and brought them together
- b. Enabled them to travel to other areas of the country to perform
- c. Gave them a hobby to do

3. How did blues music evolve and influence other genres of music?

- a. The music became faster and influenced dance music, such as square dances
- b. The sad themes of blues music started what we now know as country music
- c. The music was shared between cultures and then blended together, influencing rock music, for example

4. What are some of the contributions of other cultures to blues music?

- a. The language of different countries was used, as in cajun songs
- b. Rhythms from Africa and South America, melody lines and instrumentation from Europe
- c. The honesty of love songs from France became part of the blues music tradition

QUIZ – SHORT ANSWER

For a Google Form version of this quiz, go to:
[MVBS.org/Teacher-Resources](https://www.mvbs.org/Teacher-Resources)

1. What is one of the earlier forms of blues music?

2. How did it meet the needs of the people who played and sang it?

3. How did blues music evolve and influence other genres of music?

4. What are some of the contributions of other cultures of blues music?

MUSICIANS:



KEVIN BURT

Kevin Burt is recognized as one of the Midwest's top blues heritage educators. This honor was given to him by the Governor of Iowa, Chet Culver in February of 2009. Kevin is a registered artist and artist educator with the state of Iowa Arts Council. He has also written and published a classroom harmonica method book called

“Just Play It: an introduction to blues harmonica.” His approach is simple, education through entertainment.

For more than 25 years Kevin Burt has been electrifying audiences throughout the Midwest, dispelling the myth that true blues has no roots in Iowa. His soul-inspired presentation is unique and consistently gets him compared to a range of artists, including B.B. King. Kevin is a self-taught musician (vocals, harmonica, and guitar) whose smooth, warm vocal presentation has a welcome mixture of music and infectious humor audiences of all ages seem to enjoy. His voice and presence are powerful.

Kevin has won many awards and played many festivals both solo and with his band, the Instigators. His awards include Best Entertainer in Iowa City (three times), Best Band in Iowa City (three times), and Iowa Blues Challenge Champions. He was named as one of the top 25 unsigned blues bands in the world by the International Blues Challenge Competition.



HAL REED

Hal Reed has been playing harmonica with Kevin Burt, as a duo, for over 25 years in classrooms across Iowa. Born in Sardis, Mississippi, Hal held residency in the Quad Cities for over 30 years before returning his home state to live, in the fall of 2020. During that time, Hal performed countless blues shows throughout Iowa and as

a volunteer, taught students across the state about the history of blues music. For over 20 years, Hal has given his time to the annual Winter Blues Camp programs at the River Music Experience in Davenport, Iowa. These classes allowed him to spend one week each year training a group of students from 8-18 years old in the blues music tradition.

Most of Hal's life is dedicated to educating those around him about the original Delta style of blues that he grew up with in Mississippi. He was mostly influenced by his grandfather, a talented southern folk-blues artist. Hal's love for the blues inspired him to pass it on from generation to generation.

Hal is a two-time winner of the Iowa Blues Challenge. In 2004 he won in the band category and in 2019, the solo/duo category. In 2006, Hal won the Outstanding Volunteer of the Year from the Mississippi Valley Blues Society. In 2018, he was inducted into the Quad City Blues Hall of Fame.

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Our mission is to ensure the future of a uniquely American art form by fostering greater public appreciation through performance, education, and preservation of the Blues Heritage.

Mississippi Valley Blues Society, a nonprofit organization

The Education Committee is dedicated to increasing the public's knowledge, understanding and appreciation of blues music through live and remote performances and by providing information about the music and its' history, which includes the musicians (past and present) who play it. Education Committee programs are provided for no cost to the public.

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