



TEACHER'S GUIDE:

**BLUES ROOTS, CULTURAL
INFLUENCES ON BLUES MUSIC**

WITH ROBERT JONES

B-4; 19:13 MIN

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of the video, “Blues Roots, Cultural Influences on Blues Music,” the students will be able to:

1. Identify influences on blues music from the culture of Native Americans.
2. Identify influences on blues music from European culture.
3. Identify influences on blues music from African culture.
4. Describe how music was used to help people in Africa do their work.
5. Give one early example of a performer or show that brought together different musical influences as blues music.



1. IDENTIFY INFLUENCES ON BLUES MUSIC FROM THE CULTURE OF NATIVE AMERICANS.

Video:

African Americans and Native Americans intermarried and influenced each others music; Native American and African American often share rhythmic ideas and sounds; the song “Rock Ridge Holler” is a song with this shared sound as demonstrated on a shaker (rattler) and quills.

2. IDENTIFY INFLUENCES ON BLUES MUSIC FROM EUROPEAN CULTURE.

Video:

The fiddle had a great impact on American music. African Americans who came to America as slaves took the European violin and made it their own, playing it in the blues style. The difference between a violin and a fiddle is the style in which it is played. The harmonica is from Germany. Blues artist Sonny Terry could make the harmonica sound like anything as demonstrated in the song “Lost John.”



3. IDENTIFY INFLUENCES ON BLUES MUSIC FROM AFRICAN CULTURE.

Video:

Panpipes or quills, African drums, and the banjar (that evolved into the modern banjo) had a major influence on blues music. The clawhammer style of playing the banjo is a direct link to the African style of playing.

5. GIVE ONE EARLY EXAMPLE OF A PERFORMER OR SHOW THAT BROUGHT TOGETHER DIFFERENT MUSICAL INFLUENCES AS BLUES MUSIC.

Video:

Before electric guitars, blues music was played on acoustic guitars. Blind Lemon Jefferson, from Texas, was one of the first blue players and his music reflected many of the cultural influences of Africans, Europeans and Native Americans.

4. DESCRIBE HOW MUSIC WAS USED TO HELP PEOPLE IN AFRICA DO THEIR WORK.

Video:

Footage was shown of people in Africa working to music: in West Africa, the singing fishermen of Ghana; women singing and working the fields in Ghana; Sukema farmers hoeing a field to music. The African American spiritual, "No More," was a wood chopping song that was sung by slaves and whose rhythm assured the regular chopping motion of an axe.

Answers to Multiple Choice Quiz:

1. D 2. B 3. D 4. A 5. B

Additional Learning, from Robert Jones

“No More” is performed on panpipes (quills), with the “chop” punctuated by an instrument called the rattler (similar to a tambourine) in the shape of a paddle.

To demonstrate the early sound of the fretless banjo is the coded spiritual, “Wade In The Water.” This song is called a coded spiritual because it uses imagery drawn from the Bible to pass along information to slaves trying to escape from plantations in the South to freedom in the North. African American music from different periods have many things to teach us about social and political change.

The early banjo was also used for secular songs like “Josh Thomas’ Roustabout.” This song features rhyming and rhythmic couplets that likely were drawn from work songs of the time and is probably the earliest form of the blues verse.

The sound of the Native American flute can be heard in a traditional Southern homemade instrument called the quills or panpipes. It is believed that the proximity and intermarriage of African American and Native American people influenced the music of both cultures. A piece called “Rock Ridge Holler” is demonstrated on quills and a shaker or rattler to illustrate this cross influence. The quills used are tuned to a minor pentatonic scale. The minor pentatonic (primarily African) scale runs throughout American popular music, influencing both Black and White music.

African Americans incorporated European instruments like the violin or fiddle into their music as well. The tune “Sail Away Ladies” illustrates a White Appalachian melody, while “Another Man Done Gone” showcases the use of the fiddle from a Black musical approach.

Blind Lemon Jefferson’s song, “One Dime Blues” showcases the revolutionary sound of early blues guitar.

QUIZ – MULTIPLE CHOICE

For a Google Form version of this quiz, go to:
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1. What were the influences on blues music from the culture of Native Americans?

- a. Dancing
- b. Rhythmic ideas
- c. Sounds
- d. b and c

2. What were the influences on blues music from European culture?

- a. Harpsichord
- b. Fiddle and the harmonica
- c. Classical music

3. What were the influences on blues music from African culture?

- a. Quills
- b. Drums
- c. Banjar
- d. All of the above

4. How was music used to help people in Africa do their work?

- a. To help them coordinate working together in the fields and while paddling a boat
- b. To help them increase their wages by working harder
- c. As entertainment on their break

5. What is one early example of a performer or show that brought together different musical influences as blues music?

- a. Traveling medicine shows, at the turn of the century
- b. Blind Lemon Jefferson, from Texas, one of the first blues players
- c. Stevie Ray Vaughan

QUIZ – SHORT ANSWER

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1. What were the influences on blues music from the culture of Native Americans?

2. What were the influences on blues music from European culture?

3. What were the influences on blues music from African culture?

4. How was music used to help people in Africa do their work?

5. What is one early example of a performer or show that brought together different musical influences as blues music?

MUSICIAN:



ROBERT JONES

Rev. Robert Jones, Sr. is a native of Detroit and an inspirational storyteller and musician celebrating the history, humor and power of American Roots music. His deep love for traditional African American and American traditional music is shared in live and remote performances that interweave timeless stories with original and traditional songs. For more than thirty years Robert has entertained and educated audiences of all ages in schools, colleges, libraries, union halls, prisons, churches and civil rights organizations. At the heart of his message is the belief that our cultural diversity tells a story that should celebrate, not just tolerate.

Acclaimed photographer James Fraher writes about Robert: “Perhaps the world’s most highly educated blues musician, an ordained minister, a longtime DJ, and a living encyclopedia of blues history, the Reverend Robert Jones is comfortable among juke joint loud talkers, fancy-hatted church ladies, and PhDs alike.”

Rev. Robert Jones makes his home in Detroit while performing throughout the United States, Canada and Europe. An award-winning multi-instrumentalist, he is accomplished at guitar, harmonica, mandolin, banjo and fiddle. He has recorded six albums of original and tradition songs. Robert is the former host of the award-winning radio programs “Blues from the Lowlands” and “Deep River” broadcast on Detroit Public Radio’s WDET-FM Detroit. And, he has taught at music history courses at Wayne State University in Detroit.

In 2017 Robert and Matt Watroba co-founded “Common Chords”, 501.c3 educational organization designed to create community, cultural and historical connections through music and the arts. In 2018 Robert received a Kresge Arts Fellowship for Music Composition and Performance.

BLUES EDUCATION EVALUATION

Your participation in this short evaluation helps ensure future grant funding to support this program. Please submit feedback regarding the course you have just completed, including feedback on course structure, and content.

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THANK YOU!





MISSISSIPPI VALLEY BLUES SOCIETY

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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