



**TEACHER'S GUIDE:**

**THE BLUES - A SAMPLER OF BLUES  
MUSICIANS AND STYLES, 1903 - 1964**

**WITH ROBERT JONES**

**B-5; 21:17 MIN**

# LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of the video, “The Blues - A Sampler of Significant Blues Musicians, 1903-1964” the students will be able to:

1. Identify who is considered the Father of the Blues and explain why.
2. Name two female blues artist important in the 1920s and explain why.
3. Identify the world-known blues/ jazz musician from Davenport, Iowa who recorded the song “Davenport Blues.
4. Explain what kind of blues music was considered City Blues.
5. Identify great musicians who played City Blues and explain what they were known for.



**1. IDENTIFY WHO IS CONSIDERED THE FATHER OF THE BLUES EXPLAIN WHY.**

**Video:**

W.C. Handy because he discovered blues music being played in the South, rather than inventing it.

**2. NAME TWO FEMALE BLUES ARTISTS IMPORTANT IN THE 1920S AND EXPLAIN WHY.**

**Video:**

Mamie Smith was the first female to record blues music in 1920. Bessie Smith dominated the blues music scene in the 1920s.



**3. IDENTIFY THE WORLD-KNOWN BLUES/JAZZ MUSICIAN FROM DAVENPORT, IOWA WHO RECORDED THE SONG “DAVENPORT BLUES”**

**Video:**

Bix Beiderbecke who had a band that recorded under the name “Bix & His Rhythm Jugglers.”

*Answers to Multiple Choice Quiz:*

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

**4. EXPLAIN WHAT KIND OF BLUES MUSIC WAS CONSIDERED CITY BLUES.**

**Video:**

Blues music commonly played by a band that included an electric guitar.

**5. IDENTIFY GREAT MUSICIANS WHO PLAYED CITY BLUES AND EXPLAIN WHAT THEY WERE KNOWN FOR.**

**Video:**

T-Bone Walker was known as one of the greatest blues guitarists and singers. Muddy Waters was known equally well for his singing and playing and for his expertise at playing slide guitar. Big Mama Thornton, known for, among other things, an early recording of “Hound Dog.”

## Additional Learning, from Robert Jones

*W.C. Handy's "St. Louis Blues": W.C. Handy (1873-1958) is widely regarded as the "Father Of The Blues." A native of Florence, Alabama, he was a classically trained musician and bandleader, who heard a burgeoning style of Black folk music in 1903 while waiting for a train in Tutwiler, Mississippi. Handy moved to New York and incorporated some of the sounds that he heard that day into his own music, eventually writing and publishing a very influential blues piece called the "St. Louis Blues."*

*Mamie Smith: The first blues recording was produced when a singer named Mamie Smith (1883-1946) recorded "Crazy Blues" in 1920. Even though the record has survived for 100 years, it would be another 15 years before motion pictures with sound allowed us to see her perform. The lesson shows her in a "soundie" doing her song that had, by then, been renamed, "Harlem Blues." "Soundies," incidentally, were short films that were usually shown in theaters between main feature films. Even though Hollywood often would typecast African American actors in minor or comedic roles in movies, these soundies often showcased Black music and dance in a more positive light. Soundies were, therefore, the music videos of their day. Finally, notice that the instrumentation of blues and jazz was primarily the same during this period. Bands featured pianos, trumpets, saxophones, clarinets, violins and stand-up basses.*

*Bessie Smith: The greatest and most accomplished blues singer of the 1920s was a woman named Bessie Smith (1894-1937). Smith is seen in the video in a soundie entitled "St. Louis Blues." It features Bessie Smith in the role of a woman hopelessly in love with a two-timing man who steals from her while cheating on her with other women. Bessie is seen drinking at a bar while singing the words of W. C. Handy's classic blues song from 1914. Bessie Smith would set the standard for generations of classic blues singers. Bessie Smith died in 1937 as a result of a terrible automobile accident.*

*Women in the Blues: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey (1886-1939) was the first blues singer to tour, which is why she is called the "Mother of the Blues." Mamie Smith, by being the first blues artist to record, opened the door for the many artists that followed. Women blues singers were the original pioneers of blues music. A good source of information about early blues women is Daphne Duval Harrison's book, Black Pearls, Blues Queens of the 1920's, Rutgers Press.*

*Whistler's Jug Band: Whistler and His Jug Band was based in Louisville, KY. They performed in the 20's and 30's and were influential to later jug bands. Jug bands featured guitars, mandolins, fiddles and, of course, the jug. Their song, "Foldin' Bed Blues," is one of the earliest examples of country blues on film.*

*Bix" Beiderbecke: Leon "Bix" Beiderbecke (1903-1931) was a native of Davenport, IA. He was a cornet player and a composer whose jazz music was, of course, heavily influenced by blues. The song featured in this lesson is "Davenport Blues." Beiderbecke was the best known musician to come out of Davenport. He died of pneumonia at the age of 28.*

*Hazel Scott: Hazel Scott (1920-1981) was also a child prodigy. Scott was born in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. Her parents moved to New York when she was four and she was accepted at the famed Juilliard School of Music at the age of 8. She reputedly could play anything she heard. She probably would have enjoyed a long career as a classical pianist but racial prejudice and discrimination stood in the way of her acceptance into the world of classical music. As is obvious in her piece, "Black And White Are Beautiful," Scott was an amazingly accomplished musician. Hazel Scott used her musical skills on stage and film to promote positive images of Black music and culture. Hazel Scott later married a famed black Congressman named Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.. Hazel Scott died of cancer in 1981. It is unfortunate that many people today have never heard of Hazel Scott or experienced her talent. There are numerous examples of Scott's musicianship on YouTube as she was featured in a number of movies, where she always played herself.*

## Additional Learning, from Robert Jones (cont.)

*Frank “Sugar Chile” Robinson: “Sugar Chile” Robinson (b. 1938-) is a pianist and child prodigy from Detroit, MI. Robinson won a talent contest at Detroit’s Koppin Theater at the age of 3. The song featured here is “Numbers Boogie,” filmed in Detroit in 1950. He left music in the 1950’s, received a number of college degrees, and then made a comeback working in both blues and jazz. Robinson still lives in Detroit at age 82.*

*Aaron “T-Bone” Walker: T-Bone Walker (1910-1975) was regarded as the “Father of the Modern Blues Guitar.” He was one of the first blues guitarists to fully utilize the electric guitar in blues. Walker is associated with not only Texas blues, but West Coast blues. As the clip in the lesson shows, Walker’s blues was jazz influenced and he was able to seamlessly play with jazz giants like Sweet’s Edison, Dizzy Gillespie and Louis Bellson. T-Bone Walker’s influence is still heard in blues today.*

*Willie Mae “Big Mama” Thornton: Big Mama Thornton (1926-1984) is featured, not because of her stature as a blues innovator, but because her music represents the hard singing female blues tradition of artists like Koko Taylor, Etta James and Big Maybelle. Thornton was not only a great singer, she was an accomplished harmonica player and drummer. The song featured here, “Hound Dog,” was her most successful hit, selling over 2 million copies. However, as Thornton made, perhaps, thousands of dollars from “Hound Dog,” the next artist (Elvis Presley) made millions.*

*Aaron Elvis Presley: Elvis Presley (1935-1977) was arguably the most recognizable artist of the 20th century. Born in Tupelo, Mississippi, Presley lived in a poor section of Tupelo called Shake Rag. Shake Rag was predominately African American and Elvis was exposed to blues, gospel and other African American musical influences from an early age. When his family moved to Memphis, TN in 1943, Presley was exposed to other musical influences, both Black and White. In the mid-fifties Presley, along with artists like Chuck Berry, Little Richard Penniman, Jerry Lee Lewis and others, were all part of a Rock & Roll revolution that helped to break through barriers of musical segregation, if not discrimination.*

*McKinley Morganfield (aka Muddy Waters): Muddy Waters (1915-1983) was considered the “Father of Chicago Blues.” Along with artists like Chester Burnett (Howlin’ Wolf), Willie Dixon, Elmore James, and others, Waters took what had been a traditional acoustic Mississippi sound and converted it into an electrified sound that we now associate with modern urban blues music. The two Muddy Waters pieces represented in this lesson show two distinct approaches to modern blues. “I Got My Mojo Working” filmed at the 1960 Newport Jazz Festival shows Muddy Waters as a bandleader, dancing to music that is comparable to Rock & Roll. The second piece, filmed in France in 1964, “Country Boy,” is electrified Mississippi Delta blues, and takes us back, full circle, to the piece that started the lesson. The exception being that this blues piece has now become an ensemble or band-oriented music instead of a solo expression of music.*

# QUIZ – MULTIPLE CHOICE

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

**1. Identify who is considered the Father of the Blues and explain why.**

- a. Robert Johnson, as he played some of the most complex blues music
- b. Muddy Waters, as he was one of the first musicians to take blues music from the South to Chicago
- c. W.C. Handy, because he discovered blues music in the South, rather than inventing it, and took it to New York where he lived

**2. Name the female blues artist(s) who were important in the 1920s and explain why.**

- a. Mamie Smith as she was the first musician/female to record blues music
- b. Dinah Washington because she sang not only blues music, but many different genres of music
- c. Bessie Smith because she dominated the blues music scene in the 1920's
- d. a & c
- e. b & c

**3. Identify the world-known blues-influenced jazz musician from Davenport, Iowa who recorded the song “Davenport Blues.”**

- a. Bix Beiderbecke who had a band that recorded under the name “Bix & His Rhythm Jugglers”
- b. Little Ed and the Blues Imperials
- c. Magic Slim and the Teardrops

**4. Explain what kind of blues music was considered City Blues.**

- a. Blues music played in Chicago
- b. Blues music commonly played by a band that included an electric guitar
- c. Any blues music not played in a rural area

**5. Identify the great musician(s) below who played City Blues and explain what he/she/they were known for.**

- a. T-Bone Walker, known as one of the greatest blues guitarists and singers, the “Father of the Modern Blues Guitar”
- b. Muddy Waters, known equally well for his singing and playing, and, for his expertise at playing slide guitar
- c. Big Mama Thornton, known for, among other things, her early, successful recording of “Hound Dog”
- d. All of the above

# QUIZ – SHORT ANSWER

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

1. Who is considered the Father of the Blues? Why?

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2. Who are two female blues artist(s) that were important in the 1920s? Why?

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3. Who is the world-known blues/jazz musician from Davenport, Iowa who recorded the song “Davenport Blues”?

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4. Describe what kind of blues music was considered City Blues.

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5. What great musicians played City Blues? What were they known for?

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## 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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