

Unit on Jazz History

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This unit is useful in grades 4-6, though parts of it are adaptable to lower grades, especially grade 2, which in my district has a unit on Ghana.

Can span between 5 and 10 lessons, and be extended or reduced in all directions.

- 1) Explore the techniques of African drumming**, using djembe, tubano, and conga drums or 5-gallon water containers. (For years, I used Poland spring bottles!)
 - a) teacher models “master drummer” improvisations, students respond to the **BREAK**, a pattern that means “start” and “stop” (students often make the connection that this functions similarly to a “pause button.”)
 - b) students discover 2 or 3 different tones that can be made by striking different parts of the drum head
 - c) students learn syncopated ostinati by rote and perform them in an ensemble
 - d) students improvise 4-beat syncopated patterns on drums
 - e) teacher explains the uses of drumming in African society: more than just for musicianship, drums are used in celebrations, to send messages to other villages, and as a common language to bridge villagers with different native tongues.
 - f) students become familiar with terms and concepts
 - i) call and response
 - ii) syncopation
 - iii) break
 - iv) musical patterns with hidden meaning

2) African folk music:

- a) **Kye Kye Kule**—a West African call and response song with simple individual movement
- b) **Tue Tue Barima**—A Ghanaian song about the marketplace that contains complicated group movement
- c) **Sansa Kroma**—an Akan playground game that is played in a circle with a stone or seashell being passed from child to child, which also contains a hidden meaning and an illustration of African Proverbs (a concept taught in Grade 2)

3) Spirituals: three different types

- a) Work Song
- b) Unabashed complaints about grim conditions
- c) Songs containing hidden instructions or messages

Book: *To Be a Drum* by Evelyn Coleman and Brenda Richardson

Possible musical examples:

Wade in the Water
Let my People Go (Go Down, Moses)
No More Auction Block
Follow the Drinking Gourd
I'm going up a Yonder
Swing Low, Sweet Chariot
Down By the Riverside

Concept: The hidden messages in African drumming easily transferred to hidden messages in the words of spirituals. Similarly, the folk music sung in the fields of southern America retained characteristics of African music, such as call and response, syncopation, and hidden meanings.

4) Civil War music, Underground Railroad

Book: *Follow the Drinking Gourd*

Possible musical examples:

Tenting on the old campground
Battle Hymn of the Republic
When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again
Hard Times Come Again No More

5) Post-Civil War and Reconstruction

Many African Americans went to New Orleans, where there was a seaport, easy access to the Mississippi River and a hotbed of culture and an open-minded attitude toward change. Two early types of jazz were Blues and Ragtime.

Students will learn to compare and contrast Blues with Ragtime

Video: Billy Taylor, History of Jazz—Note: I have only a VHS copy of this, and no projector for that type anymore. There are a few youtube clips of Billy, for the purpose of showing a jazz trio in action in a very clear way.

Reviews previous material, presents a clear description of blues/ragtime and the people who performed them.

Caveat: Billy speaks VERY fast, and when the camera is on him, he is easily understood. When the picture shows something that illustrates what he is saying, we lose his words and the teacher needs to verbally highlight the important points.

6) 12-Bar Blues

Students Perform the 12-bar blues on xylophones, listening for I, IV and V harmony
One group performs each chord, using instruments that are set up in G major (I chord contains G, B, D, E and F; IV chord contains C, E, G, A and B-flat; V chord contains D, F# and A)

Students can improvise on recorder or voices to the template of their classmates' 12-bar blues pattern

Possible musical examples:

Basin Street Blues

Bad Penny

Have you ever loved a woman?

What Did I Miss from Hamilton (starting at 1:30 will skip the profanity at the beginning)

7) Students create their own Blues poetry, following teacher's example:

"I didn't do my homework, my science project broke,
[Ms. Denney] called my folks and said, 'your child is a joke!'
I got the [Bowen] school blues, I got the [Bowen] school blues,
I got the [Bowen] school blues and I'm spreadin' all the news."

Students perform their pieces, perhaps with the backdrop of their classmates playing blues pattern on xylophones

8) Ragtime

Scott Joplin, fancy clubs in the South, parades and picnics

Riverboats on the Mississippi River, which spread the new music from New Orleans to the rest of the country.

9) Jazz Greats

Students can research and present on famous jazz musicians, including but not limited to:

"Dizzy" Gillespie

Louis Armstrong (Satchmo)

Bessie Smith

Scott Joplin (the King of Ragtime)

Wynton Marsalis

Dave Brubeck

Marian Anderson

"Duke" Ellington (Edward Kennedy)

Huddie Ledbetter (Lead Belly)

Ella Fitzgerald

"Ma" Rainey

10) Extensions

Explore scat singing and vocal jazz improvisation

Change existing melodies on recorder or band instrument to incorporate syncopation, blue notes and sliding.

Read and report on books about jazz (there are at least 20 at Bowen) or

Bring in a favorite (appropriate) jazz or rock selection to share.

Follow up: Jeopardy Game

(These questions will help fellow teachers to understand what specific information was imparted during this 10-week unit)

Category: The African Homeland

100 instead of square rhythms like 'ta, ta, titi, ta,' African music uses _____ rhythm.

200 Name 2 types of African drums we used in class.

300 What is the function of drumming in an African village?

400 What do we call the signal that invites villagers to join the master drummer?

500 What members of an African village need to learn how to play a drum?

Category: Enslaved Africans

100 What is the name of the work songs of Africans in the American South?

200 Sing (with your team) one example of a spiritual with a hidden message

300 Sing (with or without your team) a different song with a message

400 Where did enslaved Africans escape to?

500 When their drums were taken away, how did the enslaved Africans communicate?

Category: After Emancipation

100 What was the name of the war that ended slavery in America?

200 Which president signed the Emancipation Proclamation?

300 What were the North and South fighting over?

400 Where did most freed slaves go after the Civil War?

500 Name two historical figures who were enslaved and later freed (Frederick Douglas and Harriet Tubman).

Category: Jazz Greats

100 Who had a bullet in his abdomen for 20 years? (Huddie Ledbetter)

200 What is the given name of Duke Ellington? (Edward Kennedy Ellington)

300 Who was the King of Ragtime? (Scott Joplin)

400 Who wrote "Take Five?" (Dave Brubeck)

500 Name 2 women who sang the blues and made it famous. (Bessie Smith, Sippie Wallace, Ma Rainey, Ella Fitzgerald, etc)

Category: Jazz vocabulary

100 What is call and response?

200 What is improvisation?

300 What is scat singing?

400 What is syncopation?

500 What are blue notes?

600 What instruments make up a standard jazz trio?