

Activity Plan

<i>Title</i>	Twelve-Bar Blues: Examining the history of the blues
<i>Subject</i>	Music: 3Ps
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<i>Grade level</i>	6-8
<i>Time duration</i>	120mins
<i>Overview</i>	Students will first learn about the history of blues music and important figures of this genre. Next, they will learn some of the key vocabulary and compositional techniques associated with the blues. Using what they have learned, students will compose a melody, using a 12-bar blues chord progression and present their melodies to the rest of the class.
<i>Objective</i>	Students will: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify, through the use of mnemonic devices, the letter names of the lines and spaces in the bass clef• Identify the roots of the I, IV, and V chords in the key of C Major using their prior knowledge of melodic intervals• Compose a melody using the blocked chords of the 12-bar blues in the key of C Major• Apply their prior knowledge of rhythm, note duration, and rules of melodic composition in their harmonic composition• Differentiate between harmonic tones that are dissonant and those that are consonant
<i>Materials</i>	Materials Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Website• Vocabulary

Activities and procedures

- [Whole Note and Blocked Chords](#)
- [Assignment Checklist](#)
- [Assessment Rubric](#)

Required Technology

- 1 Computer per Classroom
- Internet Access
- Speakers

ENGAGE

1. Have a blues CD playing when students walk in. Ask them to identify the genre.

2. Discuss the [history](#) of blues with students. Be sure to touch on the evolutionary path of [blues](#) music, originating from slave work songs, and eventually ending up in big cities like Chicago, New York, and St. Louis as the Great Migration brought African-Americans north. Play examples of early Mississippi Delta blues songs and point out characteristics of the music that came from work songs. (*Call-and-response can be seen in the bluesman "calling" with his voice and then playing a lick on his guitar between lines of verse as the "response."*)

3. Discuss how the subject matter of most blues songs reflects their origins in the "Deep South." Standard blues tunes like "Brother, Can You Spare A Dime?" and "Nobody Loves You When You're Down and Out" speak of the poverty of sharecropping families in the South. Discuss the act of performing blues or going to the local juke joint to see a performer as a necessary therapeutic release for the people of the Deep South. Even the sliding notes created by a blues singer's voice or on the guitar with a metal or bottleneck slide elicit the emotional cries of a people brought into the country as slaves.

4. Discuss Robert Johnson, Son House, Mississippi John Hurt, and other Delta blues musicians. Chicago blues players could include Muddy Waters, Willie Dixon, Howlin' Wolf, Sonny Boy Williamson, Robert Junior Lockwood. Blues singers to discuss could include Etta James, Ma Rainey, Billie Holiday, Bessie Smith, and Koko Taylor. (*If using this lesson as a stand-alone activity outside of the unit, see [Harmonic Composition](#), An Essay for an essay that students can write on a specific blues or jazz musician.*)

BUILD KNOWLEDGE

1. Hand out the [Vocabulary](#) worksheet located within the Resource Carousel and review vocabulary associated with the blues.

2. Next, explain to students that they will be composing 12-bar blues. The 12-bar blues is (*or blues changes are*) one of the most

popular chord progressions in blues music. Have students number their papers from one to twelve, representing the twelve measures of the 12-bar blues. Play the 12-bar blues bass line in whole notes using blocked chords in root position. Students will listen and put a check next to the number that represents a measure where the chord changes.

3. Have students number their papers from one to ten. Play ten sets of harmonic intervals. Students will write a "C" when the interval is pleasant and a "D" when the interval is harsh. Students will complete the words by writing "consonant" next to "C" and "dissonant" next to "D." Ask students to apply a definition to each term. Be sure to provide auditory examples of each. The definitions must be at the level of the student so that the concept can be applied in composition:

- *Consonance*: an aesthetically pleasing sensation or perception associated with the interval of the octave, the perfect fourth and fifth, the major and minor third and sixth, and chords based on these intervals
- *Dissonance*: a sensation commonly associated with all intervals of the second and seventh, all diminished and augmented intervals, and all chords based on these intervals

APPLY

1. Have students set up a page following the guidelines listed below. A sample page is necessary. This may be done on the board or on an overhead. Students will connect six pairs of staves with a grand staff. The grand staff will consist of a bar, a brace, a treble clef, and a bass clef. A 4/4 time signature will be added to the treble and bass clef of the first set of staves. Each set of two staves will be divided into two measures with the bar line extending from the top line of the first staff to the bottom line of the second staff. The [Whole Note and Blocked Chords](#) handout located within the Resource Carousel, in root position, should be drawn in the bass clef, following the sequence of the 12-bar blues:

- *Measure 1*: C Major I Chord
- *Measure 2*: C Major I Chord
- *Measure 3*: C Major I Chord
- *Measure 4*: C Major I Chord
- *Measure 5*: F Major IV Chord
- *Measure 6*: F Major IV Chord
- *Measure 7*: C Major I Chord
- *Measure 8*: C Major I Chord
- *Measure 9*: G Major V Chord
- *Measure 10*: F Major IV Chord

- *Measure 11:* C Major I Chord
- *Measure 12:* C Major I Chord

2. Review the concepts of consonance and dissonance. Students will follow these simple rules of harmonic composition to avoid a composition that sounds dissonant.

- In measures that contain the C Major Chord (or I Chord) in the bass line, the first beat of the measure must be a C, E, or G in the melody line.
- In measures that contain the F Major Chord (or IV Chord) in the bass line, the first beat of the measure must be an F, A, or C in the melody line.
- In measures that contain the G Major Chord (or V Chord) in the bass line, the first beat of the measure must be a G, B, or D in the melody line.

3. Students will compose a melody over the bass line, using the 12-bar blues, as the teacher plays the bass line on the piano in blocked chords, in root position, and in whole notes. Students should compose using classroom instruments, such as xylophones. Students should be encouraged to experiment and compose measures of music one by one, testing each measure with the piano accompaniment. The teacher will need to count the four beats of each measure aloud and return to the beginning frequently so that students are able to play their compositions from the beginning to the point at which they are in the process of experimenting and creating.

4. Students should refer to the [Assignment Checklist](#) located within the Resource Carousel as they compose.

Conclusions

REFLECT

1. After all of the compositions are complete, have a “concert” in which each student plays his or her composition for the class.
2. After the concert, have students discuss elements of their peers compositions, what they learned in the lesson, what they would do differently next time, etc.

ASSESS

Use the [Assessment Rubric](#) located within the Resource Carousel to evaluate students

Adaptations

Links and Websites

Teacher Background

Teachers should have a background in music (including composition and keyboard). They can familiarize themselves with the blues using the following sources:

Web:

- [Dallas](#) Symphony Orchestra Kids Web site
- Experience Music Project: Experiencing the [Blues](#)
- [Musictheory.net](#)

Teachers should also be familiar with Robert Johnson, Son House, Mississippi John Hurt, and other Delta blues musicians.

Prior Student Knowledge

Students should be familiar with the genre of the blues and the concepts of harmonic intervals, consonance and dissonance, music notation, and key signature.

Physical Space

Classroom

Grouping

Small Group Instruction

Staging

Create a sample page for Step 3. This may be done on the board or on an overhead.

Connect six pairs of staves with a grand staff. The grand staff will consist of a bar, a brace, a treble clef, and a bass clef.

A 4/4 time signature will be added to the treble and bass clef of the first set of staves.

Each set of two staves will be divided into two measures with the bar line extending from the top line of the first staff to the bottom line of the second staff.

The whole note and blocked chords, in root position, should be drawn in the bass clef, following the sequence of the 12-bar blues:

- Measure 1: C Major I Chord
 - Measure 2: C Major I Chord
 - Measure 3: C Major I Chord
 - Measure 4: C Major I Chord
 - Measure 5: F Major IV Chord
 - Measure 6: F Major IV Chord
 - Measure 7: C Major I Chord
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- Measure 8: C Major I Chord
 - Measure 9: G Major V Chord
 - Measure 10: F Major IV Chord
 - Measure 11: C Major I Chord
 - Measure 12: C Major I Chord