

# ***THE STORY OF THE BLUES***



An interactive multi-media learning and performance project

Created and developed by

Pablo Rodriguez Vocal Music P.S. #4

West New York Eisenhower Project 2008-2009

## **Project Overview**

*The Story of the Blues* project will engage students in the majesty of America's most enduring and quintessential musical character. Awareness of universal music elements and knowledge of history will serve as prequel to personal explorations, expressions, and solo and group performances. Students will be exposed to the many styles, moods, and creative expressions inherent to *The Blues*. The students will learn about famous musicians, vocabulary words associated with the Blues, songs from various time periods, and how to become more critical listeners and thinkers. Students will also gain aesthetic awareness of music through performances by Blues musicians, both live and in audio/video recordings. Students will be encouraged to compose their own songs with knowledge of melody, rhythm, harmony, and form. The project will culminate in a concert featuring classic Blues, and students' original songs.

## Content Objectives

Students will be able to;

- Recognize the varied sounds, modes, and presentations of *the blues*.
- Acquire knowledge of musical terminology relating to *the blues*.
- Identify important historical events in the development of American music leading up to the present time.
- Interpret the emotional character of various musical examples, and express what *the blues* means to them personally.
- Understand the musical and poetic elements of *the blues* including; rhythm, melody, harmony, form, repetition, catharsis, call and response, etc...
- Sing and/or play the blues in private and public performance.
- Collaborate on music composition, and write music in a blues style.

## Technology Objectives

- Use various websites and search engines to gather data
- Mix content with technology
- Create a **Word** document with bullets, borders, bold print, italics, and various fonts and text sizes
- Import pictures into a **Word** document

## Core Curriculum

{WORK.PK-4.9.2.C.2} Select and use language appropriate to the situation. (NJ Core Curr )

{WORK.PK-4.9.2.C.1} Develop positive social skills to interact with others. (NJ Core Curr )

{WORK.PK-4.9.2.B.4} Recognize personal likes and dislikes. (NJ Core Curr )

{WORK.PK-4.9.2.B.3} Accept criticism and respond constructively. (NJ Core Curr )

{WORK.PK-4.9.2.A.3} Identify and access print and non-print resources that can be used to help solve problems. (NJ Core Curr )

{WORK.PK-4.9.1.B.1} Describe and demonstrate the importance of personal and interpersonal skills. (NJ Core Curr )

{WORK.PK-4.9.1.A.2} Identify abilities and skills associated with various careers. (NJ Core Curr )

{AR.3-4.1.5.B.2} Examine art as a reflection of societal values and beliefs. (NJ Core Curr )

{AR.3-4.1.5.B.1} Describe the general characteristics of artworks from various historical periods and world cultures. (NJ Core Curr )

{AR.3-4.1.5.A.1} Identify works of art from various historical periods and diverse cultures. (NJ Core Curr )

{AR.3-4.1.2.D.3} Generate works of art based on selected themes. (NJ Core Curr )

{AR.3-4.1.1.B.2} Compare and contrast works of art that communicate significant cultural meanings. (NJ Core Curr )

{TEC.K-4.8.1.A.7} Create and maintain files and folders. (NJ Core Curr )

{TEC.K-4.8.1.A.4} Produce a simple finished document using word processing software. (NJ Core Curr )

{TEC.K-4.8.1.A.3} Input and access text and data, using appropriate keyboarding techniques or other input devices. (NJ Core Curr )

{TEC.K-4.8.1.A.2} Use basic features of an operating system (e.g., accessing programs, identifying and selecting a printer, finding help). (NJ Core Curr )

{SOC.3-4.6.1.A.6} Distinguish fact from fiction. (NJ Core Curr )

{SOC.3-4.6.1.A.3} Locate sources for the same information (e.g., weather forecast on TV, the Internet or in a newspaper). (NJ Core Curr )

{SOC.3-4.6.1.A.2} Apply terms related to time including years, decades, centuries, and generations. (NJ Core Curr )

{SOC.3-4.6.1.A.1} Explain how present events are connected to the past. (NJ Core Curr )

{MA.K-12.4.5.F.1} Use technology to gather, analyze, and communicate mathematical information. (NJ Core Curr )

{MA.K-12.4.5.B.1.1} Use communication to organize and clarify their mathematical thinking.

Reading and writing  
(NJ Core Curr )

{MA.K-12.4.5.A.1} Learn mathematics through problem solving, inquiry, and discovery. (NJ Core Curr )

{LA.4.3.2.D.1} Write for different purposes (e.g., to express ideas, to inform, to entertain, to respond to literature, to question, to share) and a variety of audiences (e.g., self, peers, community). (NJ Core Curr )

{LA.4.3.1.H.2} Investigate a favorite author and produce evidence of research. (NJ Core Curr )

{LA.4.3.1.G.5} Follow simple multiple-steps in written instructions. (NJ Core Curr )

{LA.4.3.1.A.3} Identify and locate features that support text meaning (e.g., maps, charts, illustrations). (NJ Core Curr )

{LA.4.3.1.A.1} Identify differences of various print formats, including newspapers, magazines, books, and reference resources. (NJ Core Curr )

{ELL.3-5.V.A.7} Respond to and evaluate the use of illustrations to support text. (NJ Core Curr )

{ELL.3-5.V.A.4} Begin to demonstrate an awareness of different media forms and how they contribute to communication. (NJ Core Curr )

{ELL.3-5.R.F.2} Use the dictionary, thesaurus, and other reference materials to identify alternative word choices and meanings. (NJ Core Curr )

{ELL.3-5.R.E.2} Recognize the need to seek assistance (e.g., teacher, peers, and other resources). (NJ Core Curr )

{ELL.3-5.R.E.1} Identify specific words or passages causing comprehension difficulties and seek clarification. (NJ Core Curr )

{ELL.3-5.S.C.5} Use varied word choice to clarify, illustrate, and elaborate. (NJ Core Curr )

{ELL.3-5.S.C.3} Recognize and use Standard English appropriately. (NJ Core Curr )

{ELL.3-5.S.B.5} Contribute information, ideas, and experiences to classroom inquiry. (NJ Core Curr )

{ELL.3-5.S.A.3} Participate in full class, group, and pair discussions. (NJ Core Curr )

{ELL.3-5.L.B.2} Listen to and summarize a story and/or information from various sources (television, film, speaker, or assembly). (NJ Core Curr )

{ELL.3-5.L.A.2} Listen to read, watch, and respond to plays, films, stories, books, songs, computer programs, and magazines. (NJ Core Curr )

{WORK.5-8.9.2.C.2} Organize thoughts to reflect logical thinking and speaking. (NJ Core Curr )

{WORK.5-8.9.2.A.1} Communicate, analyze data, apply technology, and problem solve. (NJ Core Curr )

{WORK.5-8.9.1.B.5} Compare and contrast possible choices based on identified/perceived strengths, goals, and interests. (NJ Core Curr )

{AR.5-6.1.3.B.2} Demonstrate knowledge of the basic concepts of meter, rhythm, tonality, intervals, chords, and harmonic progressions. (NJ Core Curr )

{AR.5-6.1.2.B.5} Demonstrate how the elements of music are used to achieve unity and variety, tension and release, and balance in composition. (NJ Core Curr )

{AR.5-6.1.1.B.1} Explain the aesthetic qualities of specified art works in oral and written responses. (NJ Core Curr )

{AR.5-6.1.1.A.4} Describe the compositional design in selected works of art or performance. (NJ Core Curr )

{AR.5-6.1.1.A.3} Describe how an element of an art form contributes to the aesthetic value of a particular work. (NJ Core Curr )

{TEC.5-8.8.1.A.5} Create documents with advanced text-formatting and graphics using word processing. (NJ Core Curr )

{TEC.5-8.8.1.A.2} Use common features of an operating system (e.g., creating and organizing files and folders). (NJ Core Curr )

{SOC.5-8.6.6.D.2} Analyze demographic characteristics to explain reasons for variations between populations. (NJ Core Curr )

{SOC.5-8.6.4.G.1.6} Explain the major events, issues, and personalities of the American Civil War including:  
The role of African Americans  
(NJ Core Curr )

{SOC.5-8.6.2.B.1} Analyze how certain values including individual rights, the common good, self-government, justice, equality and free inquiry are fundamental to American public life. (NJ Core Curr )

{SOC.5-8.6.1.A.1} Analyze how events are related over time. (NJ Core Curr )

{SCI.K-2.5.1.A.2} Keep records that describe observations, carefully distinguish actual observations from ideas and speculations, and are understandable weeks and months later. (NJ Core Curr )

{MA.5.4.1.5 A.3} Demonstrate a sense of the relative magnitudes of numbers. (NJ Core Curr )

{LA.5.3.1.G.2} Identify genre by their distinctive elements (e.g. tall tale-exaggeration). (NJ Core Curr )

{LA.5.3.1.G.1} Identify author's purpose, views, and beliefs. (NJ Core Curr )

{LA.5.3.1.F.2} Infer specific word meanings in the context of reading passages. (NJ Core Curr )

{ELL.6-8.L.A.9} Listen to determine a speaker's purpose, attitude, and perspective. (NJ Core Curr )

{ELL.6-8.L.A.6} Demonstrate active listening by analyzing information, ideas, and opinions to determine relevancy. (NJ Core Curr )

{ELL.6-8.L.A.2} Listen to and imitate how others use English. (NJ Core Curr )

{ELL.6-8.L.A.1} Listen to, read, watch, and respond to plays, films, stories, books, songs, computer programs, and magazines. (NJ Core Curr )

{HE.5-6.2.2.D.2} Discuss the characteristics of a role model and how role models influence the personal goals and ethical standards of others. (NJ Core Curr )

{HE.5-6.2.2.D.1} Describe actions and situations that show evidence of good character. (NJ Core Curr )

## Lessons

### **The Blues**

Obj: Introduce students to the music of Blues legends for historical awareness and singing practice

Activities: 1) Review the definition of *blues* and introduce class to Muddy Water's recording of "**Baby Please Don't Go**", as class reads along with the lyric sheet.

2) Students will participate in class discussion objectively describing the music heard, such as instruments, rhythm, tonality, form... Students will complete Listening Exercise in their notebooks, for a closer analysis and deeper understanding

3) Students will learn the melody using solfege syllables, and copying into their notebooks.

4) Continue process for other blues songs such as **Move it on Over, Pride and Joy** and **Hound Dog**...

5) Students practice singing these songs with piano or guitar accompaniment.

5) Time permitting, allow students to watch music videos of Muddy Waters and Lightning Hopkins

Materials/Resources: Audio recordings of Blues greats, *Get America Singing* songbooks, Vocal music website, Listening Exercise sheets

Evaluation: Students will be evaluated through vocal responses, preparation for class, class participation, and completion of homework assignments.

---

### **Blues biography project**

Obj: Students will learn about blues musicians by using internet resources for research, and use various media for presentation and sharing of information

Activities: 1. Students will be introduced to various blues musicians and styles through video and audio recordings.

2. Students will be divided into 5 or 6 groups to work on collecting biographical information. Each group will focus on one of the following musicians; Robert Johnson, Leadbelly, Muddy Waters, Lightning Hopkins, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Bessie Smith, Bonnie Raitt, Chuck Berry, Howlin Wolf, or B.B. King.

3. Each group is responsible for the following information gathering; 5 biographical facts, 5 songs by the artist, 5 characteristics of style, and 5 images of the artist.

4. Students will use technology to organize and present their information. This will include creating word documents with bullets, bold print, italics, various text sizes, and importing pictures.

5. Finally, students will use the data and images collected to present artistic and informative posters.

Materials/resources: Oncourse webpage, Wikipedia, Google, Various musical recordings

Evaluation: Each group will receive a grade for their collective efforts. See Blues Biography rubric

## Listening Exercise Rubric

	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Very good</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Needs help</b>
<b>Identify general information from listening exercise.(genre, instruments)</b>	Correctly identify the genre and instrumentation	Correctly identify the genre and most of the instruments	Could identify a similar genre and only some of the instruments	Could not identify the genre or the instruments
<b>Listen critically for deeper musical elements(Rhythm, key form)</b>	Displays an understanding of tempo, rhythm, tonality, and form of the song	Correctly identify 3 of the following; tempo, rhythm, key, form	Correctly identify 2 of the following; tempo, rhythm, key, form	Could not identify the following; tempo, rhythm, key, form
<b>Identify the literary and emotional character of the piece</b>	Student is able to interpret the mood and lyrical content of the piece convincingly	Student is able to interpret the mood and lyrical content of the piece adequately	Student is able to interpret only the mood or lyrics without explanation	Student is unable to interpret the mood or lyrical content of the piece
<b>Express a thoughtful reaction to the listening exercise</b>	Expresses a unique and personal opinion and thoughtful comments about the music	Expresses a valid opinion and an interesting comment about the music	Student is able to express an opinion on the music, but lacks supportive comments	Student is unable to develop an original and thoughtful reaction to the music

## Blues Biographies Rubric

	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Very good</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Needs help</b>
<b>Identify important historical events in musician's life</b>	Identifies 5 or more important events in artist's biography	Identifies 3 or 4 important events in artist's biography	Identifies 1 or 2 important events in artist's biography	Unable to find important events in musician's life
<b>Identify songs associated with artist</b>	Identifies 5 or more songs by artist	Identifies 3 or 4 songs by artist	Identifies 1 or 2 songs by artist	Unable to find songs by the artist
<b>Identify significant characteristics of musical style</b>	Able to identify 5 or more characteristics of artist's musical style	Able to identify 3 or 4 characteristics of artist's musical style	Able to identify 1 or 2 characteristics of artist's musical style	Unable to identify characteristics of artist's musical style
<b>Select appropriate images for use in presentation</b>	Able to find 5 or more images of artist	Able to find 3 or 4 images of artist	Able to find 1 or 2 images of artist	Unable to find any images of artist

**Optional extra credit-** Interpret the blues poetically, artistically, or through creative writing project...

“What does the Blues mean to you?”

# Appendix A

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Class \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Blues Vocabulary Matching -match the term with the best definition

- |                          |                            |                         |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Boogie Woogie _____   | 8. R & B _____             | 15. Up-tempo _____      |
| 2. Call & response _____ | 9. Gospel _____            | 16. Rock & Roll _____   |
| 3. Chicago Blues _____   | 10. Jazz _____             | 17. Secular _____       |
| 4. Delta Blues _____     | 11. Rhythm section _____   | 18. Sharecropping _____ |
| 5. Improvisation _____   | 12. Twelve bar blues _____ | 19. Slide _____         |
| 6. Work song _____       | 13. Stop time _____        | 20. Blues shuffle _____ |
| 7. Backbeat _____        | 14. Blue notes _____       |                         |

- a. Having a fast or lively tempo
- b. Any music not adapted to religious, spiritual or sacred uses.
- c. A musical device in which the forward flow of the music stops, or seems to stop.
- d. A blues style that comes from a region in the southern part of Mississippi, a place romantically referred to as "the land where the blues was born."
- e. A classic blues style that was developed in the late 1940s and early 1950s, taking Delta blues, fully amplifying it, and putting it into a small-band context.
- f. The most common form of blues. Refers to the number of measures used to express the theme of a typical blues song.
- g. A musical term referring to the alternation between two musical voices in a work, particularly that between a solo singer and a group chorus.
- h. A form of instrumental blues, esp. for piano, using melodic variations over a constantly repeated bass figure.
- i. Musically, the act of composing, performing, or otherwise playing without prior planning or consulting specific notation such as sheet music.
- j. A system of farming that developed in the South after the Civil War, when landowners, many of whom had formerly held slaves, lacked the cash to pay wages to farm laborers, many of whom were former slaves.
- k. Impassioned rhythmic spiritual music of rural blacks in the American South, central to the development of rhythm and blues and of soul music.
- l. An American musical style of the 20<sup>th</sup> century characterized by syncopated rhythms and improvisation.
- m. The musicians in a popular music band or who establish the rhythmic pulse of a song or musical piece, and who lay down the harmonic structure.
- n. A musical term used to describe the break-up of a beat into two parts where the first is longer than the second.
- o. A sharp rhythmic accent on the second and fourth beats of a measure in 4/4 time, characteristic of rock music.
- p. A combination of blues and jazz that was developed in the United States by Black musicians;
- q. A folk song sung by workers, with a rhythm like that of their work.
- r. A method of playing guitar where the player uses either a tube placed over the finger (such as a "bottleneck") or a flat edged object (such as a knife blade) to press down the strings of the guitar.
- s. A flatted note, esp. the third or the seventh degree of the scale, recurring frequently in blues and jazz as a characteristic feature.
- t. American popular music style first heard in the 1950s; derived from the union of African-American rhythm and blues, country-western, and pop music.

## Appendix B

Title: (when)

Performer: (where)

Genre: (style)

Instruments:

Rhythm: a) tempo (speed)

b) feel (How does the beat go?)

c) changes

Key: (major or minor)

Form: (introduction, middle, ending)

Mood: (overall feeling)

Lyrical content: (What is the song about?)

Opinion: (How did the song make you feel?)

Other comments:

## Bibliography

Ainslie, Scott, and Dave Whitehill. Robert Johnson: At the Crossroads. Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 1992.

"The Blues by Langston Hughes." 15 May 2009  
<<http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-blues/>>.

"The Blues." PBS. 14 May 2009 <<http://www.pbs.org/theblues/>>.

Get America Singing... Again! Vol. 1 (Singer's Edition). Grand Rapids: Hal Leonard Corporation, 1996.

"Langston Hughes and the Blues." Rockhall. Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum. 14 May 2009 <<http://www.rockhall.com/teacher/sti-lesson-2/>>.

"Midnight Special." Songfacts. 14 May 2009  
<<http://www.songfacts.com/detail.php?id=8813>>.

Vaughan, Stevie Ray. Stevie Ray Vaughan - Lightnin' Blues 1983-1987. 2nd ed. New York: Hal Leonard Corporation, 1990.

## Self-Evaluation

*The Story of the Blues* has been a great learning experience for me, and it was a pleasure teaching a subject that I am very interested in. Students were not immediately interested in the subject matter, but after exposing them to various modes of the blues, and musical examples, they began to appreciate the genre, and get into the material. I believe the Listening Exercise activity improved student's ability to listen actively and creatively, and the Blues Biography project allowed students to implement technology and work co-operatively which students really enjoy. The historical component of the lesson I believe gave students a better idea of how modern music has been shaped and influenced by the masters of the Blues. In teaching these lessons I also was able to really sharpen my skills as a guitarist and become a better musician myself.