

Sing Me A 12-Bar Blues

Museum Connection: Art and Enlightenment

Purpose: In this lesson students will examine the origins of the Blues and the reasons for its creation. They will identify the traditional 12-bar Blues, listen to performances by Wilbur Sweatman, Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Blues composed by W. C. Handy. They will accompany themselves singing a Blues song on the guitar by using chords.

Grade Level and Content Area: High School Fine Arts Guitar Class

Time Frame: 2-4 one-hour class periods.

Before teaching this lesson, students should have learned how to play D, G and A7 chords on their guitars.

Fine Arts Instrumental/Vocal Music ELOs:

I.A.3 The student will describe differences in interpretation of two or more performances of the same musical selection.

II.B.2 The student will write traditional music notation (including constructing chords).

II.D.1 The student will demonstrate knowledge of appropriate performance styles while singing or playing music from a variety of eras or ethnic origins.

Objective(s):

In order to use standard musical notation to create tonic, dominant, and subdominant chords in the Key of "D," students will perform a standard 12-bar Blues progression with a Blues shuffle pattern on the guitar; accompany a student's vocal performance of a Blues song; create one stanza of lyrics for a standard Blues song; and describe and discuss origins of the Blues.

Vocabulary and Concepts:

Blues	type of instrumental or vocal music developed amongst slaves during the period of slavery, usually slow, sad, and mournful.
Bar	a measure of music.
Scale	a rising or falling series of notes, beginning and ending on the same note.
Chord	two or more notes sounding together.
Chord Progression	a series of chords played in a pre-determined sequence.
Tonic	the root of the scale.
Dominant	the fifth note of the scale.
Subdominant	the fourth note of the scale.
Blues Shuffle Pattern	rhythmic pattern in which two consecutive notes or chords are played unequally, with the first sounding longer than the second.
Embellishment	decoration of a melody by adding in extra notes.

Materials:

For the Teacher:

Guitar

CD Player

DVD Player

CD Recordings:

1. Making Music Silver Burdett – Scott Foresman “Joe Turner Blues”
2. Wilbur Sweatman “Recorded in New York 1916-35”

Jazz Oracle Records BDW 8046 (2 CD set)

<http://www.jazzoracle.com>

Disc 1 Track 8 “Joe Turner Blues”

DVD Recording:

“Blues Masters- The Essential History of the Blues”

Rhino Home Video ISBN 1-56605-841-4

Volume 1 Track 4 - Bessie Smith singing “St. Louis Blues”

Volume 2 Track 3 - Billie Holiday singing “Fine & Mellow”

Teacher Resource Sheet 1: Chronological Overview of the Blues
Teacher Resource Sheet 2: Who was Joe Turner?
Teacher Resource Sheet 3: “St. Louis Blues”
Teacher Resource Sheet 4: Suggested Answers for Student Resource Sheet 1
Teacher Resource Sheet 5: Answers for Compare & Contrast, and Rubric for Grading Assessments

For the Student:

Guitar

Student Resource Sheet 1: Anticipation Guide
Student Resource Sheet 2: 12-Bar Blues
Student Resource Sheet 3: “Joe Turner’s” song
Student Resource Sheet 4: Compare and Contrast Two Performances
Student Resource Sheet 5: Billie Holiday and lyrics to “Fine and Mellow”
Student Resource Sheet 6: W. C. Handy & Bessie Smith Photos and Bios
Student Resource Sheet 7: Lyrics to “St Louis Blues” and Write Your Own

Historical Background:

According to David Evans in his essay, “Blues – Chronological Overview:” during the first decade of the twentieth century, the term “blues” began to be applied to a new type of song emerging from Black communities in the Southern United States. According to Evans, the predecessors of this new song were the spirituals, field hollers, and work songs of the African American slaves. He also said it should be viewed as part of a wave of innovation in Black American music at this time that saw the first stirrings of ragtime, jazz, gospel music and barber-shop style vocal harmony. This creativity coincided with a hardening of White resistance to Black social and economic progress in the form of Jim Crow laws (laws limiting African American freedoms and rights in U.S. society, named for the minstrel character “Jim Crow”) and the institutionalization of racial segregation, disenfranchisement of Black voters, lynching and other forms of terrorism, and the loss of jobs to a swarm of European immigrants.

With emphases on the performer, the creative composer, improvisation, soloing, and self-expression, the new music became more introspective, self-absorbed, individualistic, serious, and worldly at the very time that the majority of Whites were viewing all Blacks as an undifferentiated social caste with stereotyped mental and behavioral traits that cast them as ignorant, humorous, and carefree. Evans further states that the new types of music would challenge these stereotypes and lead the way in the Black struggle for freedom, justice, and equality throughout most of the twentieth century.

Evans describes four characteristics that in particular have a special association with the blues: blues texts, the role of instruments, “blue notes,” and blues forms.

1. **Blues Texts:** Blues lyrics are extremely frank and almost exclusively concerned with the self, though in relation to others. They may (and often do) contain humor, but this is usually as an expression of irony, cleverness, double or multiple meaning, or social commentary and criticism, not as an illustration of buffoonery, or stupidity.

2. **The Role of Instruments:** An instrument or group of instruments plays a necessary role in the construction and performance of the song itself, rather than serving simply as a more or less optional harmonic and rhythmic background to the vocal part. The instrumental part is, in fact, a second voice (sometimes several voices), punctuating and responding to the vocal lines.
3. **The Blue Note:** As the term itself suggests, blues introduced the concept of the blue note into American music. This term is used rather loosely, but essentially it means a note, sounded or suggested, that falls between two adjacent notes in the standard Western division of the octave into twelve equal intervals.
4. **Blues Forms:** The majority of blues utilize the twelve-bar AAB form or some variant or approximation of it. At its most basic, the stanza consists of a line of verse (A), the same line repeated, and a third line (B) that rhymes with the first two. The form description tells us that the line usually begins with the suggestion of the tonic chord harmony, the second with the subdominant, and the third with the dominant, each of them resolving in the tonic chord by the time of the instrumental response.

Burnim, Mellonee V., & Portia K. Maultsby (2006). *African American music An introduction*. New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group

Bibliography:

1. Burnim, Mellonee V., & Portia K. Maultsby (2006). *African American music An Introduction*. New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
2. Beethoven, Jane (2002). *Silver Burdett Making Music*. Parsippany, NJ: Scott Foresman/Pearson.
3. "Joe Turner's Come and Gone: Introduction." *Drama for Students*. ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 17. Detroit: Gale, 1998. [eNotes.com](http://www.enotes.com). January 2006. 8 July 2006. <<http://www.enotes.com/joe-turners/19476>>.
4. Jeter, Deborah (1997, Feb. 6). Joe Turner blues was what some term as a prototype blues song. Retrieved 7/9/06, from http://www.suite101.com/print_message.cfm/music_education/189/636
5. Handy, W.C.. (2006). In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved July 21, 2006, from Encyclopædia Britannica Premium Service: <http://www.wip.britannica.com/eb/article-9039137>
6. Snow, Joel (1997, October 7). Blues Online© Bessie Smith. Retrieved July 16, 2006, from Blues Online© Web site: http://mathrisc1.lunet.edu/blues/Bessie_Smith.html

7. Lacy, Susan (1984). American Masters . Billie Holiday PBS. Retrieved July 16, 2006, from PBS Web site:
http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/holiday_b.html

Lesson Development:

Motivation:

Talk about the Blues, play an example on the guitar, and have students discuss what they think the Blues is about. Ask them if they know any examples of Blues music, and ask if they think it has any relationship to the modern musical style of R&B (Rhythm & Blues).

Lesson One

1. Students complete the left columns of **Student Resource Sheet 1: Anticipation Guide**. Collect the sheets, or have the students keep them in a safe place in their music folders.
2. Tune guitars and practice strumming the following chords: D, G, A7.
3. Use **Student Resource Sheet 2: 12-Bar Blues** to identify D as I (tonic) chord, G as IV (subdominant) chord, and A7 and the V7 (dominant seventh) chord. Complete the sheet, using standard musical notation to write the I, IV, and V7 chords in the key of D.
4. Students will play the 12-bar blues progression on the bottom of **Student Resource Sheet 2** using four quarter note strums per bar. Play again using the down-up shuffle rhythm given on **Student Resource Sheet 2** on the guitar.
5. Teacher performs or plays the Silver Burdett/Scott Foresman recording of “Joe Turner Blues” while students read **Student Resource Sheet 3: Joe Turner’s Blues** and listen. <http://www.n8fan.net/item/ghost-town-of-the-american-west-reading-street/> Play or perform again while students listen and read, singing, if possible.
6. When they have the song in their minds and voices, have them play the 12-bar blues as they sing. To ensure success for all students, more capable students can play all of the chords, while those who need extra time can play on the tonic chord as they sing and rest on the other chords.
7. Play Wilbur Sweatman’s recording of “Joe Turner Blues.” <http://www.redhotjazz.com/wswjssbnd.html> Students will recognize the tune, yet realize that this is much different from the first performance they heard, either their teacher’s or the Silver Burdett/Scott Foresman performance.

8. Pass out **Student Resource Sheet 4: Compare and Contrast Two Performances**. As you play Wilbur Sweatman's recording again, have students write a paragraph comparing the two performances. If they do not begin writing in a few seconds, you may have to conduct a class discussion about the subject in order to give students ideas. Play the first recording again so the students can readily hear the similarities and differences.
9. Students will end the class by accompanying themselves on the guitar as they sing "Joe Turner Blues" one more time.

Lesson Two

1. After guitars are tuned, perform "Joe Turner Blues" by singing and strumming a shuffle pattern on the guitar.
2. Introduce Billie Holiday as a major Blues singer from Baltimore, Maryland and show DVD excerpt of the artist performing "Fine and Mellow." Use **Student Resource Sheet 5: Billie Holiday and lyrics to "Fine and Mellow"** with this part of the lesson.
3. Introduce W. C. Handy as the "Father of the Blues" who wrote "Joe Turner Blues" in 1915. Use **Student Resource Sheet 6: W.C. Handy & Bessie Smith Photos and Bios**.
4. Ask the students to speculate why W. C. Handy wrote a song about Joe Turner. Who was Joe Turner?
5. After students have shared their ideas, tell them the origins of Handy's song. See **Teacher Resource Sheet 1: Chronological Overview of the Blues**.
6. Discuss with the class: "the Blues is about the troubles of life; can it also be about troubles in love?" (Yes). The "St. Louis Blues" is another song written by W.C. Handy, and it is his most famous standard Blues song written about love gone wrong. It has the 12-bar blues chord progression and the words fit the form AAB. The first two phrases are the same and the third phrase ends in a word that rhymes with the first two phrases. As often happens, the third phrase is kind of a humorous or ironic response to the first two lines. Bessie Smith is another famous Blues singer and composer. Read about her on **Student Resource Sheet 6**. She usually dressed in glamorous clothing, yet in the video clip they will see, she is wearing a dark dress and hat, standing at a bar, rarely even looking into the camera while she performs the song that made her famous: "St. Louis Blues."
7. Pass out **Student Resource Sheet 7: Lyrics to St. Louis Blues**. Students will read the lyrics while listening to and watching the DVD.

8. As **Student Resource Sheet 7** instructs, perform “Joe Turner Blues” once again paying close attention to the rhythm of the tune (melodic rhythm) and perform again humming the tune instead of the words so they can be thinking of their own words to create. If it would be helpful to the students who choose to write lyrics to “St. Louis Blues,” play the version of “St. Louis Blues” recorded by Silver Burdett/Scott Foresman and printed on **Teacher Resource Sheet 2**.
9. Have students write their own AAB text to their choice of either the tune of “Joe Turner Blues” or the tune of “St. Louis Blues” in the space provided on **Student Resource Sheet 7**.
10. Have the students practice quietly, playing the song and singing their own lyrics.
11. Choose at least one student to share. During another class, students may practice some, and others may perform for the class.

Assessment:

1. Students will complete the graph for Compare and Contrast and subsequent summarizing paragraph. See **Student Resource Sheet 4** and **Teacher Resource Sheet 5**.
2. Each student will write a paragraph answering the final questions about the evolution of the Blues on **Student Resource Sheet 1** and **Teacher Resource Sheet 5**.

Closure:

Pass out **Student Resource Sheet 1: Anticipation Guide**. Instruct students to answer statements on the right side. Discuss each statement with students and have them give reasons for their answers. Ask if they changed their mind about any of the statements. Students are to use the rest of the page to summarize in their own words the evolution of the Blues and how trends in society helped create this art form. Ask them if they think they have discovered any connections to R&B as they have been learning about the Blues and singing it.

Thoughtful Application:

The Blues is often seen as the first example of African-American poetry in the United States. Slaves used the blues to tell of their troubles, hardships, and their life stories through its simple verse structure. To write a blues verse, you write a statement about how you’re feeling, or something that has happened, then repeat it, and add a third line which rhymes. Here’s an example:

Don't know why I have to work so long in the sun,
Don't know why I have to work so long in the sun,
I can't wait 'til this long work day is done.

Using the blues three-line verse structure, tell the story of an immigrant slave brought over from Africa, working in the fields, and eventually escaping to freedom. Use as many verses as you need to tell the story. Write it in the first person (from the slave's point of view). You might like to add a melody and sing it with the blues guitar chords you learned in this lesson.

Extensions:

1. Introduce students to the lyrics of "Strange Fruit" sung by blues artist Billie Holiday. The song discusses the horrors of lynching and racism. Visit the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture to witness the display on Maryland lynching in the "Things Hold, Lines Connect" gallery.
2. Have students tour the museum and visit the Fine Arts area to experience the Blues, how society helped shape this style of music, and see the Billie Holiday exhibit.
3. Play and sing your own version of the tune "Joe Turner Blues" in the key of G. What are the new tonic, subdominant and dominant chords? Is it easier or harder for you to sing in the new key?
4. Practice playing the 12-Bar Blues in the Key of D or G on your guitar and create your own melody and another set of lyrics.

Teacher Resource Sheet 1

Chronological Overview of the Blues

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Teacher Resource Sheet 2

Who was Joe Turner?

The Blues lyrics reflect problems of everyday life. "Joe Turner Blues" is about a real person and the devastating affects of his actions. August Wilson, African American playwright, wrote a play called "Joe Turner's Come and Gone" to great critical reviews. It was inspired by W. C. Handy's Blues song, "Joe Turner Blues."

Two quotations about Joe Turner follow:

August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, first produced in 1986 by the Yale Repertory Theatre, was published in the United States in 1988. The play was inspired both by the 1978 Romare Bearden artwork *Mill Hand's Lunch Bucket* and the blues song "Joe Turner's Come and Gone." The song, which was recorded by legendary blues artist W. C. Handy, was first sung by many estranged Black women who had lost their husbands, fathers, and sons to Joe Turner—a plantation owner who illegally enslaved Blacks in the early twentieth century.

"Joe Turner's Come and Gone: Introduction." Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 17. Detroit: Gale, 1998. eNotes.com. January 2006. 8 July 2006. <<http://www.enotes.com/joe-turners/19476>>.

Joe Turner Blues was what some term as a prototype blues song. It is "folk-blues" or "blues" before it was recognized art. The Joe Turner of the now familiar song was, Joe Turney who was the brother of Pete Turney, the governor of Tennessee from 1892-1896. Joe was known in Memphis as a 'long chain man' who regularly came to the city to lead batches of convicts to the penitentiary at Nashville. He was thus a figure of awesome unpopularity. Perhaps, the song will have more meaning with this background information.

Jeter, Deborah (1997, Feb. 6). Joe Turner blues was what some term as a prototype blues song. Retrieved 7/9/06, from http://www.suite101.com/print_message.cfm/music_education/189/636

Teacher Resource Sheet 3

St. Louis Blues

For resource,

Open Hyperlink below

<http://www.musicnotes.com/sheetmusic/mtdFPE.asp?ppn=MN0053677&ref=google>

Teacher Resource Sheet 4

Suggested Answers to Student Resource Sheet 1

Anticipation Guide

Before studying the Blues		Statement	After studying the Blues	
<u>AGREE</u>	<u>DISAGREE</u>		<u>AGREE</u>	<u>DISAGREE</u>
		The Blues was created by the first African American slaves during the Colonial Period		√
		Society's treatment of African Americans is reflected in the Blues	√	
		The Blues is an expression of emotion	√	
		Blues and Jazz are styles that are not related to one another		√
		The Blues has nothing to do with love or romance		√
		The Blues reflects troubles in life and everyday occurrences	√	
		William Christopher Handy is The "Father of the Blues"	√	
		There are no famous Blues performers from Maryland		√
		The Blues is performed and heard all over the world	√	

Points to be included in closing paragraph:

1. Treatment of African Americans by Whites and society during the era following the Civil War: not considered equal, Whites were fearful of advancements made by Blacks, Whites only felt comfortable with the "vision" that Blacks were less intelligent and less likely to be productive.
2. Personal feelings of people - rejection, having troubles in life and love, having little money, feeling low or depressed.
3. This genre or style followed the spirituals and work songs of the slaves.
4. W. C Handy is considered "Father of the Blues".
5. Examples of blues songs "Joe Turner Blues" & "St. Louis Blues" and performers: Wilbur Sweatman, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday are given.

Teacher Resource Sheet 5

Answers for Compare and Contrast and Assessment Rubric

Suggested Answers for Compare and Contrast on Student Resource Sheet 4 Compare and Contrast Two Performances of “Joe Turner Blues”

BOTH Same song title
Written by W.C. Handy
Same melody
Same melodic rhythm
12-bar Blues chord progression

Silver Burdett/Scott Foresman Recording

Style is Jazz style from a later period than early 1900's
Solo Woman's Voice
Melody has embellishments-added notes
Band, playing in blues/jazz style
Rather slow tempo
Shuffle rhythm accompaniment
Full or thick texture

Wilbur Sweatman Recording

1920's older style
Instrumental only: solo clarinet and brass band
No percussion
No voice or lyrics
Very embellished – many more additional notes
Faster tempo
Thin texture – lighter
Many more repetitions of melody
Each time melody is repeated, it is varied

Assessment Rubric

Grade	Compare & Contrast See Teacher Resource Sheet #3 For possible answers	Closing Paragraph See Teacher Resource Sheet #3 For points
A	Very clear writing: Perspective is reinforced by effective use of examples and music vocabulary	Very clear writing: Four to five points are included
B	Generally clear writing: Writer's ideas could be followed Some use of examples and music vocabulary	Generally clear writing: Three points are included
C	Lacks clarity: Writer's ideas are difficult to follow Very little use of examples or music vocabulary	Lacks clarity: Two points are included
D	Not clear: Writer's view is not apparent	Not clear: zero to one point is included

Student Resource Sheet 1

Name _____ Date _____

Before you study the Blues style of music, check whether you agree or disagree with the statements using the columns on the left.

Return this paper to your teacher or put into your notebook for later.

After you have studied the Blues, see if you have changed your mind, and check whether you agree or disagree in the right columns.

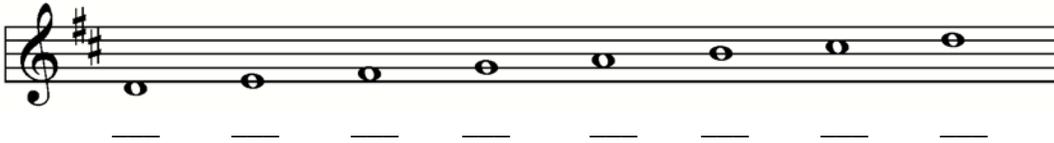
Anticipation Guide

Before studying the Blues		Statement	After studying the Blues	
<u>AGREE</u>	<u>DISAGREE</u>		<u>AGREE</u>	<u>DISAGREE</u>
		The Blues was created by the first African American slaves during the Colonial Period		
		Society's treatment of African Americans is reflected in the Blues		
		Blues and Jazz are styles that are not related to one another		
		The Blues is an expression of emotion		
		The Blues has nothing to do with love or romance		
		The Blues reflects troubles in life and everyday occurrences		
		William Christopher Handy is The "Father of the Blues"		
		There are no famous Blues performers from Maryland		
		The Blues is performed and heard all over the world		

Finally, write a paragraph about how the Blues evolved. Who created it and why? What emotions, events, societal trends, do the Blues express and reflect?

Student Resource Sheet 2

- The **D Major Scale** is represented on the staff below. The structure of a Major scale is whole step, whole step, half, step, followed by three whole steps and one half step. This requires the F to be sharp and the C to be sharp, so there are two sharps in the D Major scale. The D below the staff is number 1. Number each step of the scale.



- The **I chord is called tonic**, and is similar to the home plate on a baseball field. In baseball you begin and try to end on home plate and many songs begin and end on tonic. In the D Major scale, tonic is D. Create a D Major or I chord by drawing whole notes over the whole note on D on the 3rd and 5th step of the scale.
- The Dominant chord is a chord built on the 5th step of the scale, so it is called the **V chord**. Starting with a whole note on A, draw a chord and add a fourth note of a G on the very top; this note is seven steps above the first note, so it is called a A7 or V7 chord.
- The Subdominant chord is built on the 4th step of the scale and is called the **IV chord**. Starting with a whole note on G, draw a chord using the 6th and 8th notes of the scale.



(2.) D or I chord



(3.) A7 or V7 Chord



(4.) G or IV Chord

- These three chords are used in a **12-bar Blues song**. Play these chords as they are shown with a down-up shuffle rhythm on your guitar.

Lichtenberger

Student Resource Sheet 3

Student Resource Sheet 3

Joe Turner's Blues

For resource,

Open the Hyperlinks below:

<http://www.n8fan.net/item/ghost-town-of-the-american-west-reading-street/>

http://acumen.lib.ua.edu/u0004_0000003_0000047#item%3Du0004_0000003_0000047_0001%3B

http://www.lct.org/content/show/JoeTurner_2.pdf

Note: go to page 11

Student Resource Sheet 4

Compare the performance of “Joe Turner Blues” on the first recording with a performance of the same song by Wilbur Sweatman, a contemporary of composer W.C. Handy. How are they alike?

Write all of the similar characteristics below, where it says “List similarities”.

Write individual characteristics of your performance as well as Mr. Sweatman’s where it says “List differences”.

As you listen, think about what is making the sounds: voices, instruments and types of each? Did Mr. Sweatman change the melody or the rhythm? Does one performance have more notes than the other? What about tempo or speed of the performance?

List similarities:

List differences:

Use the notes from above to construct a paragraph that compares the two performances.

Student Resource Sheet 5

Lyrics to “Fine and Mellow” by Billie Holiday with Biography

For Lyrics

Open Hyperlink below:

<http://www.mp3lyrics.org/b/billie-holiday/fine-and-mellow/>



This photograph is from the [William P. Gottlieb Collection](#) which was purchased by the Library of Congress in 1995. The collection consists of jazz photographs taken from 1938 to 1948 by writer-photographer [William P. Gottlieb](#). In accordance with the wishes of Gottlieb, the photographs in this collection entered into the public domain on February 16, 2010

Billie Holiday:

Billie Holiday’s birth name was Eleanora Fagan. She was born in 1915 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and spent most of her early years in Baltimore, Maryland where she was raised mostly by her mother’s half sister’s mother-in-law. She lived in extreme poverty and dropped out of school in the fifth grade. In 1929, Billie Holiday moved to Harlem, New York to live with her mother.

She was interested in singing the blues and jazz. As a result, Billie began singing at several clubs in Harlem. In 1933, at the age of twenty, she received her first breakthrough when jazz writer and producer John Hammond heard her fill-in for a well-known singer. This discovery led to her eventually singing with several great jazz musicians including Benny Goodman, Count Basie, Artie Shaw and Duke Ellington. She formed a person relationship with saxophonist Lester Young which led to them being friends throughout their lives. They created some of the greatest jazz recordings of all time together and gave each other the nicknames of “Lady Day” and the “Prez.”

Billie Holiday established a real audience in 1939 with her song, “Strange Fruit.” This was a powerful song which was based on a poem about lynching that was written by Abel Meeropol who was a Jewish school teacher from the Bronx, New York. Some of her other well-known songs include “God Bless the Child,” “Gloomy Sunday,” “Lady Sings the Blues,” and “Good Morning Heartache.” Her songs were unconventional and some expressed incredible pain.

She died at the age of forty-four. During her life-time, Billie Holiday was exposed to many ills of society including racism, sexism, and drug addiction. Her distinctive vocal style of delivery was slow with a rough jazz quality. She was a master of improvisation and pioneered a new way of manipulating phrasing and tempo.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billie_Holiday

http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/holiday_b.html

Student Resource Sheet 6

W.C. Handy and Bessie Smith



William Christopher Handy:

(Born Nov. 16, 1873, Florence, Ala., U.S.—Died March 28, 1958, New York, N.Y.)

Black American composer who changed the course of popular music by integrating the blues idiom into the then-fashionable ragtime. Among his best-known works is the classic “St. Louis Blues.”

A son and grandson of ministers, Handy was educated at Teachers Agricultural and Mechanical College, Huntsville, Ala., and worked as a schoolteacher and bandmaster. He conducted his own orchestra from 1903 to 1921.

Handy worked during the period of transition from ragtime to jazz. Drawing on the vocal blues melodies of Negro folklore, he added harmonizations in his orchestral arrangements. His work helped develop the conception of the blues as a harmonic framework within which to improvise. With his “Memphis Blues” (1911) and especially his “St. Louis Blues” (1914), he introduced a nostalgic element peculiar to the music of Southern blacks. This was achieved chiefly by use of the “blue” or slightly flattened seventh tone of the scale, which was characteristic of black folk music. Later he wrote other blues pieces (“Beale Street Blues,” “Careless Love”) and several marches and symphonic compositions. Forced to publish “St. Louis Blues” himself, he organized a publishing firm, which he directed until late in his life. He issued anthologies of Negro spirituals and blues and studies of black American musicians. His autobiography, *Father of the Blues*, was published in 1941.

Handy, W.C.. (2006). In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved July 21, 2006, from Encyclopædia Britannica Premium Service:
<http://www.wip.britannica.com/eb/article-9039137>



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Bessie Smith:

Nicknamed **the Empress of the Blues**, Bessie Smith was one of the most popular female blues singer of the 1920s and 1930s. The exact date of her birth is not known, but it is estimated that she was born between 1892 and 1894 in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Her musical career began when she was discovered by Ma Rainey around 1912. Smith became a headliner on the black T.O.B.A. circuit and rose to be its top attraction in the 1920s. As a result, she became the highest paid black entertainer of her day and was booked at \$1500 a week. She made 160 recordings for Columbia and was often accompanied by Lois Armstrong who was one of the best musicians of those times.

In 1933, John Hammond, who was also the mentor for Billie Holiday, asked Smith to record for Okeh Records (which was acquired by Columbia records in 1925). Her career began to falter in 1930 due to mismanagement of her affairs, and her heavy drinking.

On September 26, 1937, Smith was critically injured in a car accident while traveling along U.S. Route 61 between Memphis, Tennessee and Clarksdale, Mississippi. Recordings of Bessie Smith's were inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame. In 2002 Smith's recording of “Downhearted Blues” was included by the National Recordings Preservation Board in the Library of Congress National Recording Registry. It is also listed in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as one of the 500 songs that helped to shape rock'n'roll.

