

# America's Blues

## Lesson Plans

### Introduction

These lessons accompany the film *America's Blues* and are designed to make students think critically about the influence of Blues in modern society and culture. The movie and the lesson plans help connect the Blues to all popular American music genres and to various other aspects of our popular culture.

### Learning Objectives

- To connect the Blues to other genres of popular American Music.
- To create a piece of Art that reflects the feelings of a Blues song.
- To examine the myth of Robert Johnson.
- To explore the role of Blues and Jazz in Film.

### Preparation Instructions

To prepare for these lessons, students must first watch the full 85-minute version of *America's Blues*.

### Additional Resources

- Mississippi Blues Trail
- The Blues Foundation
- Living Blues Magazine
- American Blues Scene

### Lesson Activities

1. The Music of America
2. The Feelings of the Blues
3. Devil at the Crossroads
4. Hollywood Blues

### Activity 1. The Music of America

The purpose of this activity is to make students think critically about the influence of Blues Music in other Genres. After watching *America's Blues*, or the first half of *America's Blues*, break the students up into 5 or 6 groups depending on the size of the class. Each group will be assigned a genre of music. Gospel, Jazz, Country, R&B, Rock and Roll, and Hip Hop. The students will then find an artist or a song in that genre and connect their music to the Blues. For example, Country Music could use Hank Williams, who was taught to play guitar by a Blues Musician by the name of Rufas "Tee Tot" Payne. The examples from the movie should be used as a guide in finding similar stories and connections. The student groups will present their artist and song and explain the connection to the Blues.

## **Activity 2. The Feelings of the Blues**

This is an art activity and can be tailored to each classes material availability. You will find a popular Blues song and play it for the students. It could be any song of your choosing but try and pick one that has the most emotion in it. Play the song for the students and tell them each to create a piece of art that reflects the way the song makes them feel. I suggest having as many different types of art supplies available because the point of the exercise is to get the students to connect the Blues to as many other forms of art as they can think of. The idea being that the Blues has been so powerful in our society that it has created an entire thriving subculture of Blues and Folk Art that this exercise will hopefully introduce the students to.

## **Activity 3. Devil at the Crossroads**

The myth of Robert Johnson, well, actually Tommy Johnson, is sprinkled throughout our culture. After watching the movie, discuss the myth with the students and tell them to each create a short story that contains the myth of the Devil at the Crossroads, or a similar idea of selling your soul to the devil for something and paying the ultimate price

## **Activity 4. Hollywood Blues**

When people think about the Blues, they typically don't think about Hollywood and Films, but Blues Music is a huge part of a lot of television and film and this activity is designed to show the students just how much of an influence Blues has on the media we watch. This exercise should be given as a homework assignment. The exercise is simple. Watch TV or movies with your parents, and pay attention to the background music and other sound effects that are Blues sounds. Have them find 3 movies, commercials or television programs that use Blues Music in them. The assignment, and the exercise, are really only there to make the students pay attention to more than just the story and to be aware of just how much Blues indirectly influences their lives and what they see on tv