

WS21 COLLEGE Lesson Plan

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Title: A Celebration of Roots Music

Subject: Roots Music Genres: Blues, Folk, and Bluegrass

Length of Lesson: May vary depending on chosen project design

Grade Level: College Level

Introduction and Overview: This episode of WoodSongs Old-Time Radio Hour is a celebration of Grassroots music. Musical genres featured on this episode include Blues, Bluegrass, and Folk music. This is a broadcast about the world of roots music and the organizations that help organize the artists. They are TRADE organizations operating in a world where the music business has really changed and artists can barely make a living. This episode celebrates the world of GrassRoots Music, (front porch music), with the organizations that helped present it and preserve it worldwide. Michael Johnathon explains the world of roots music as a beautiful garden with different rows. The first musical genre presented is Blues.

Blues: Featured on this episode is Barbara Newman, President and CEO of The Blues Foundation. The Blues is a form of music that was started a long long time ago. Robert Johnson ignited the blues spark. Robert Johnson, with just a few songs, changed the world of music and it became a global and passionate form of art.

The Blues Foundation is a worldwide phenomenon of music. The Blues Foundation have a number of initiatives to preserve blues heritage. They also have a number of youth programs, work with blues societies all over the world to bring blues to schools, and all to make sure that blues music is celebrated and preserved at the same time. There is a WoodSongs kid featured playing the blues. He is 17 years old and shares that he started playing the guitar at age 6.

The next form of roots music featured is Bluegrass music.

Bluegrass: Bill Monroe is known as the father of Bluegrass. He said Bluegrass music has brought more people together and made more friends than any other music.

Within this episode, The IBMA, International Bluegrass Music Association, is featured on the show. Bluegrass in the Schools programs and also Momentum awards to recognize up and coming Bluegrass artists.. Other representative had first Grand Ole Opry performance at 12 years old. She talks about meeting lifelong friends and people that you look forward to seeing every year at Bluegrass events through IBMA. Roots music world is 9 times out of 10, the real music is happening in the parking lots and campgrounds, very communal, very community oriented, everyone wants to pass on the heritage to the next generation. Everybody plays in bluegrass, kids are welcome to play with the professionals and are encouraged to do so.

Bluegrass music is then demonstrated. The focus is on the WoodSongs IBMA kid, Ivy Philips, Encourage students to focus on instruments being played. Ivy is 15 years old and plays the fiddle, and started playing at age 3 or 4. This is encouraging to students as they recognize that they could learn to play a musical instrument.

The next guest on the show is Dr. Ron Pen. Dr. Pen is on the creative board of SongFarmers. He describes SongFarmers as, "tiling the great soil of music." SongFarmers is a relatively new

organization and started out as part of WoodSongs. It is a way of taking music that people were playing and sharing and giving them a front porch to share it. The SongFarmers Association wants music to be a powerful part of life, not necessarily making a living at it. Song farmers make music in their community, bring education to people through music, and create a front porch for people to play. Ask students to think about what this concept, of “creating a front porch to perform.”

There are SongFarmer chapters nationally and it is a network where musicians can find one another. Dr. Pen describes the jams, which are festivals, or can be smaller, front-porch playing jam sessions as well! Folks bring their instruments and play together. People gravitate to them because the music is a way to be with people and is a way of humanity. SongFarmer chapters create the opportunity to share the music, and also creates and supports educational outreach in schools using the archives of WoodSongs. SongFarmers say what we need is a front porch around the world. You can turn your front porch into one of the most peacekeeping venues in the world! (We will talk more about this concept in the activities.)

Michael Hastings, a young guitar player, says SongFarmers allows more connection and to remain in touch with fellow musicians and friends. He plays a Doc Watson song called, Deep River Blues.

Folk music is the next genre of Grassroots music referenced in the show.

Folk Music: Folk Music represents the community where the music comes from and originated. The father of folk music, Woodie Guthrie, used the poetry of words and thoughts and actions to express what was going on in the world around them. The Folk Alliance representative is featured on the show, and he describes the Folk Alliance as a family. Folk music places emphasis on poetry. Folk music means different things in different regions. Folk music, overall, is the music of the people; it is the story-telling approach of the issues and the ideas of the day. A ten year old and twelve year old perform a song they’ve written. Have students focus on the words of the song and specifically, “thinking about how to help the world.”

Activity 1:

After watching this episode of WoodSongs, have a conversation Grassroots music. Discuss the genres of grassroots mentioned in the show, as well as the TRADE organizations. As an exit slip, students will respond to the following in journal format:

1. What do you think Michael Johnathon means when he says the words, “We need a front porch around the world.”
2. What does your front porch look like? Explain that this is symbolism, and that the goal of the activity is not to describe their actual structural front porch, but rather, where they may sing and perform. Where may they recite poetry in their home or school? Will their front porch be their yard? Basically, we want students to realize that their front porch is the place where family and community come together and that music enriches this sense of community. That being said, playing music on the front porch is also a stage, and so if that is where these moments come together, we want to hear about it! How can their front porch turn into a peace keeping venue? Encourage students to use descriptive language.
3. Finally, the third prompt will be for students to explain how they feel music encourages a sense of community and family, and to offer an example of a time in which they have had this feeling with family and/or friends. Students will complete this based upon all of the genres presented, (blues, folk and bluegrass).

Activity 2: Students will write their own poem. Please refer to the Folk Alliance portion of this episode, and ask students to write a poem that expresses issues and ideas of the day. Students are encouraged to write a ballad. Discuss the history of ballads as well as what a ballad is and the art of storytelling. Encourage the students to think of themselves as story-tellers.

Activity 3: This activity will include having the students design a media project in which they select 10 folk songs that are of particular significance to them. The students will upload (preserve) the songs, research the song, provide a brief history of it, and include the words to accompany the song. This could be a blog, or another form of a media project that your students have already studied are familiar with designing. If you wish, you may take this opportunity to introduce a new form of media project design. This project is also a way for students to express why they have selected their chosen folk songs. Why do they feel it is important to preserve these songs? This is in reference to the information that Dr. Pen describes when talking about the SongFarmers.

Activity 4: This activity is for the purpose of informational text. Students will select one genre of grassroots music (blues, bluegrass or folk) and write a four page paper about the history of the music. Students should include at least five reliable sources. This is also a good opportunity to discuss writing for different purposes and to varying audiences and the importance of proper citation, as well as citing scholarly and reliable sources. This will also be a good opportunity for students to practice their research skills, as well as, utilizing library resources.

Goals & Objectives:

- Students will understand the history of folk, blues and bluegrass music and how it encourages togetherness; in turn, how music encourages togetherness and community
- Students will be familiar with the sounds of the musical genres and particular instruments played in the broadcast
- Creativity encouraged through project designs
- Knowledge of musical genres
- Knowledge of musical instruments introduced and played in WoodSongs episode
- Builds communication and presentation skills
- Encourages creative design
- Critical Thinking
- Creative Thinking
- Encourages students to make connections of how music tells a story and delivers a message
- Understanding of music as community building
- Understanding of the importance of the preservation of music and developing archives to do so

For work of this nature, I find that it works best to let the projects serve as the assessments. That way, students are more focused on the creative design of their projects. You may choose to design a rubric to meet your specific qualifications for each project. Rubrics are very important to establish and maintain clear outcomes for each project.