



Ethnic Studies Lesson 4H: African Americans and Blues/Jazz

TOPIC:

AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

GRADE LEVELS:

11-12

TIME:

1½ HOURS

California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Themes, Values, and Principles Alignment

Themes:

1. Identity
2. History and Movement

Values and Principles:

1. Cultivate empathy, community actualization, cultural perpetuity, self-worth, self-determination, and the holistic well-being of all participants, especially Native People/s and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).
2. Celebrate and honor Native People/s of the land and communities of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color by providing a space to share their stories of success, community collaboration, and solidarity, along with their intellectual and cultural wealth.

California English and Social Science Standards Alignment

English Language Arts Standards (11th and 12th Grade):**Reading—Informational Text (RI.11-12)**

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem. (RI.11-12.7)

Social Sciences Standards (11th and 12th Grade):**History-Social Science Content Standards—(Grades 9-12)**

Analyze the role of cultural movements, such as the Harlem Renaissance, in challenging stereotypes and promoting social change. (11.5)

Lesson Purpose

Students will research the history of blues and jazz music and identify some of its early artists and their contribution to the breaking down of African American stereotypes.

Essential Questions

What is the history of blues and jazz music, and who are some of its early artists? How did blues and jazz contribute to the breaking down of African American stereotypes?

How has life changed for African Americans in the last 250 years?

Materials

[Blues—Short History](#)

[Smithsonian: What Is Jazz?](#)

[Unit 4 KWL Chart](#)

Vocabulary

blues

jazz

Lesson Steps

Step 1:

- As a class, ask students what they already know about blues and jazz music. As a class, have students watch [Blues—Short History](#) and [Smithsonian: What Is Jazz?](#) As students watch, ask them to make notes of how the music celebrates African American culture and how it also breaks down stereotypes of the time. When the videos are complete, have students share their answers. If time permits, share examples of older blues music (such as [Robert Johnson—Me and the Devil Blues](#)) with newer blues music (such as [B. B. King and Tracy Chapman—The Thrill is Gone](#)). Or listen to [Poetry by Langston Hughes—The Weary Blues](#).

Step 2:

- Let students know that they will be continuing their work on the classroom gallery on breaking down stereotypes. Pairs or groups of students who have completed the Harlem Renaissance project may begin working on the following people and places of the early blues and jazz movement. Have students select one of the topics below. Let students know that this is just a sample of musical artists from the early 20th century. There are many more African American blues and jazz artists. They will create an exhibit and be the spokesperson for that exhibit when it is presented. Students may select their own educational websites and need to be careful to cite their sources. They can create a display using multiple methods, including charts, slideshows, and computer links.

Muddy Waters	Cotton Club
Bessie Smith	Duke Ellington
Big Bill Broonzy	Billie Holiday
Robert Johnson	Josephine Baker
Chick Webb	Cab Calloway
Ella Fitzgerald	Louis Armstrong

Step 3:

- When students have completed their research, break the class into two groups. Have one group stay at a station in order to present the information and let the other group go through the gallery exhibits. Have students switch places so that everyone has an opportunity to go through the exhibits as well as present.

Step 4:

- As a class, ask students the questions from the last two lessons, “What is the history of blues and jazz music, and who are some of its early artists? How did blues and jazz contribute to the breaking down of African American stereotypes?” and “Who were the artists of the Harlem Renaissance? How did the music, art, and literature of the Harlem Renaissance contribute to the breaking down of African American stereotypes?” Also, ask this unit’s question, “How has life changed for African Americans in the last 250 years?” Add what was learned to this unit’s KWL chart.

Essential Question Assessment, Application, Action, and Reflection

As time permits, have other classes or groups visit the classroom gallery and let students lead visitors through the gallery and explain their exhibits. Help students focus on the theme of breaking down stereotypes as well as the infusion of African American culture across the US after the Great Migration.

Additional Readings and Resources

Collier, James Lincoln. *Jazz: The American Theme Song*. Oxford University Press, 1993.

Sowell, Thomas. *Ethnic America: A History*. Basic Books, 1981, 183-224.

NOTE TO EDUCATORS REGARDING ADDITIONAL READINGS AND RESOURCES: America is a pluralistic country, ethnically. It is also a pluralistic country politically—left, right, and center. Ethnic studies educators have ready access to resources from the left-of-center in the [2021 California Model Curriculum](#) and in the [Liberated Model Curriculum](#). This Comparative Cultures Ethnic Studies curriculum favors teachers exposing students to views from across the political spectrum. Educators often lack guidance to materials from outside the left-of-center. Therefore, in the sections on Additional Readings and Resources, the Comparative Cultures Ethnic Studies curriculum alerts educators to credible resources that provide an alternative to the other Model Curricula. In doing so, this curriculum encourages educators to acquaint students with evidence-based views from left, right, and center.

Ethnic Studies 4A: KWL Chart

KNOW	WONDER	LEARNED
<i>What do we think we already know about this topic?</i>	<i>What do we wonder about this topic? Write your questions below.</i>	<i>After the research is completed, what did we learn? Make sure to cite your source.</i>