

Exposing Primary Age Students to African American Musical Genres and the History of African American Music

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Overview

This curriculum unit will focus on exposing primary age students to many African American musical genres, as well as the history of African American music. This unit will be targeted to an audience of second grade students; however it may be adapted in other elementary level classrooms. Music is the intended subject area as my school does not have a music teacher; I am required to create my own music lessons in my classroom. This unit will not only focus on the area of music, but it will supplement the Philadelphia School District's core curriculum for social studies and literacy. The time frame of the unit will be a four to six week period, in which the students will be participating in various activities, such as, reading, writing, research, listening and speaking.

During this unit, the students will participate in a number of activities focused around African American music. The students will focus on the distinguishing characteristics of African American musical genres, become familiar with famous African American musicians from the genres, and explore their own musical preferences in comparison with that of their parents and/or family members' music styles of their youth.

Rationale

There is a lack of exposure to the arts in classrooms today. This is an important area, yet many students are being denied the privilege of this knowledge because of the stress on test scores. The focus on test scores leaves little time for the important areas of study such as music, art, science and social studies. These areas are given little time, if any, in my school.

My students have an interest in music and I want to learn more about their personal musical preferences. I will expose them to music that has an historical meaning to their culture. They will also get to learn how African American music came about and how it defined the people and social relationships in the past. We will discuss and research the history of African American music, starting with music that was created by slaves. We will then spend most of our time on genre studies of African American music. These genres will include slave music, jazz, blues, gospel and soul, rock'n roll, rhythm and blues, pop, rap and hip-hop. We will study the characteristics of each genre and famous musicians from each genre. Some of the artists we will listen to and research will be, B.B. King, Bessie Smith, Louis Armstrong, Muddy Waters, Thomas Dorsey, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Grandmaster Flash, Ella Fitzgerald, Duke Ellington, Tina Turner, Aretha Franklin, Chuck Berry, Lauryn Hill, Jay-Z, and other artists.

Music has a powerful impact on our lives. Music is an essential part of the students' balanced education. It is believed that student performance excels in all areas when exposed to music. The second grade social studies curriculum spends a lot of time focusing on community and the ways that people interact in their communities. This is where I would tie in being part of organized groups in your community in relation to music. The students will get involved with musical groups in their community, such as local student choirs, local theatres and/or church groups or choirs. In his book, *Race Music*, Ramsey describes community theaters as cinema, family narratives and histories, the church, the social dance, the nightclub, the skating rink, and even literature (4). These types of social interactions are familiar to primary students on various levels. Many of the students go to church, interact with family members, and are exposed to literature. They are familiar with skating rinks and dance clubs. These social concepts will be good starting points to have the students begin to understand the concept of community and become active in their own community.

Background

When beginning the unit, the students will learn about slavery and the importance of music in slavery. Music was an important endeavor of slaves because it helped them to endure many hardships. In *Lift Every Voice*, Peretti states that music helped African Americans, free people of color as well as slaves, to conceptualize freedom and to explore spiritual and secular self-expression (7). I want my students to recognize the importance of music during this time, and how it continues to be important throughout history to present day. I want to represent slavery to them in a factual, but sensible manner. It is important for them to be aware of the hardships, as well as understand how music was therapeutic to the people during this time. I will discuss the four great migrations, and the important events that took place during each, and how music was a common piece to each. We will begin with music that was present on the slave ships and introduce the call and response patterns. We will discuss spiritual music and its

prominence in the African Christian Church during the second great migration. During the third migration, we will focus on the emergence of blues and jazz music and move into the growth of hip-hop in the fourth migration. I believe it is important to cover the history of these migrations. In *The Making of African America-The Four Great Migrations*, Berlin states that nothing can better reveal the transformations of African American life than music (36).

After the history of the migrations, we will begin more in depth discussions of the many popular musical genres mentioned above. The blues became a very popular and powerful musical style in the late 1800's and into the 1900's. The blues were a very influential sound for African American musicians. I want the students to become familiar with the forms associated with each style of music. We will listen to selected blues songs and identify the "AAB" form in the songs. We will discuss the important artists associated with the blues, such as Muddy Waters. We will examine the female artists that became popular during this era, as well. These artists include Dinah Washington, who was known as the "Queen of the Blues" and Bessie Smith referred to as the "Empress of the Blues".

Jazz emerged and boomed in the 1920's. Jazz was influenced by ragtime and the blues, but had its own unique sound as well. Jazz was profound in the city of New Orleans and this city was important to the music and musicians. Louis Armstrong, born in New Orleans, was one of the most famous jazz musicians. Jazz also became prominent in Chicago and New York City. Duke Ellington, another famous musician of the jazz genre, was born in Washington, D.C. and became a successful musician there. Later, he moved to New York and became a prominent figure of the Harlem Renaissance. Some famous female artists during this period were Ella Fitzgerald, known as "The First Lady of Song," and Sarah Vaughan who was also known as a great singing talent by many of her peers.

Gospel music was a spiritual music associated with Christian life. Thomas Dorsey was a significant figure during this time. Dorsey worked as a pianist and composer and performed with popular singers such as Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith (Peretti 129). Dorsey worked with many other female gospel artists as well. Gospel and blues music helped to create R& B and later, rock 'n' roll. This genre of African American music became popular around the 1950's. In *Lift Every Voice*, Peretti describes talking bass solos, falsetto tenor voicings, choral backgrounds, and rhythmic vocal accompaniment as typical sounds associated with this sound. The electric guitar was a new musical sound at this time and the popular artists were Sam Cooke and Ray Charles.

Peretti states "since 1970, some African Americans in popular music have achieved unprecedented fame, wealth and cultural influence" (149). Michael Jackson is a prime example of a legendary artist of the "pop" music genre. His record *Thriller* was hugely successful when released in 1982 (Peretti 149). Many students are familiar with Michael Jackson however, because of their young age, they were not as exposed to his success as

most people are. A history of his childhood and early success will be included in this unit. Other artists that were notorious to the “pop” genre at this time were Tina Turner, Whitney Houston, and Prince.

In the 1990’s hip-hop emerged on the music scene. Hip-hop was described as a way for youth to express themselves through music, language and fashion styles. In *Race Music*, Ramsey refers to rap as “revolutionary” and as “the emotional focal point of the presentation” (165). In its early forms, rap was performed by DJs and then by MCs. An influential artist of the hip-hop genre was Grandmaster Flash. He is known as a founding father of hip-hop. He had a great knowledge of audio equipment and began to use the turntable as an instrument.

Objectives

The unit will encompass the curricular areas of music, social studies and literacy. The lessons are aligned with the School District of Philadelphia’s Core Curriculum for literacy and social studies. During the unit, students will study and become familiar with African American musical genres such as, jazz, blues, gospel, soul, rhythm and blues, rock’n roll, pop, rap and hip-hop.

The students will research these genres in small groups or partnerships. At the conclusion of their research, the students will orally present what they have learned about their genres. During the time of their independent research, we will discuss and read about the genres as a whole class. Students will choose an artist from the genres we have studied, and complete an independent research project on their chosen artist. They will write a biography of this artist, including visual materials and musical selections. We will also explore various musical instruments, especially those commonly used in African American music. If we are able to gain access to instruments, I would like for the students to experience the instruments hands-on. If available, any live performances we are able to gain access to or have performed at our school would be ideal.

The objectives will touch on many standards under the area of Arts and Humanities in Historical and Cultural Contexts. Students will relate works in the arts to historical events, analyze traditions and analyze how important historical events impact the arts. The standards for literacy will fall under reading, writing, speaking and listening, and research. The students will write informational pieces on the genres and artist, including pictures and illustrations. We will have discussions on a regular basis, where students will be accountable for contributing to and participating in small and large group discussions. The students will conduct research by locating information using appropriate sources and then organize and present the main points from their research.

Strategies

This unit includes age-appropriate websites and literature for my students to research the various genres and artists. Various media sources, including but not limited to records, compact discs and videos, will be incorporated in the unit. Students will be engaged in a variety of activities. They will research and improve their writing and communication skills through reports and presentations. Small and large group discussions will play an important role in the unit.

A Timeline of African American Music: Students will be required to create a timeline that briefly illustrates the evolution of African American Music. They will be presented with information from the work songs during the time of slavery to modern day rap and hip-hop. This information will be used to complete their timelines.

Community: As I mentioned above, I would like the students to be involved in music in their neighborhood and community. We will seek out local musical groups and explore the possibilities of going to see live performances and/or have live performances come to our school. I would also like to get the families and community members involved in a musical program for Black History Month.

Interviews: I will begin this part of the unit by having the students' interview family members about music styles of their youth. I will use the feedback from these interviews as a way to determine some of the artists we will research. Above I have listed many African American artists that we will cover. I am hoping to get ideas of additional artists through these interviews.

School Programs: Our school does not have many musical opportunities available to the students; the only options are an after-school guitar club and recorder club. These programs are only offered to students in grades three through five. I would like to have a chorus program available to all students.

Research: Students will conduct research of many aspects of African American music, such as, famous musicians, popular genres, and musical instruments. They will use resources such as, books, magazines, video, and the Internet to conduct their research.

Graphic Organizers: Students will use graphic organizers during their research and during my presentations of the history of African American music, genre studies, artist studies and popular musical instruments to record the information. One graphic organizer we will use is the K-W-L chart. The students will use this during the unit to show their prior knowledge of the subject, what they want to learn and what they learned at the conclusion of each lesson or part of the unit. They will use Venn Diagrams to compare and contrast various aspects of African American music. Other graphic organizers will be used to guide them in writing and increase their knowledge of important vocabulary terms.

Oral Presentations: Students will be required to orally present their research during this unit. The students will present at various times throughout the unit. They will present information on genres, artists, and musical instruments.

Discussions: Students will be required to participate in small and large group discussions throughout the unit. Students will work in partnerships and small cooperative groups. We will also have many whole class discussions regarding the material.

Journals: Students will be required to keep a journal specifically for reflections on the material covered in this unit. Students will be required to reflect on the information or write about their own personal experiences or opinions in relation to the topics.

Assessments: Students will be assessed on their written reports, oral presentations, graphic organizers, class work, participation in discussions, participation in group work, and journals.

Classroom Activities/Lesson Plans

Below are sample lesson plans that will be used to teach the curriculum unit. These will not be the only lessons; however I feel that these lessons and activities are main parts of the unit.

Lesson 1: Interviews of Family and Community Members

Objective: Students will interview family or community members about music styles of their youth and present the results in a whole-class discussion.

Materials/Resources: Take-home interview form

Procedures: Students will be provided with an interview form to take home and interview a family member or community member about the music styles of their youth. The students will bring the results of the interview to class and we will use this information to begin a discussion on African American musical genres and African American artists from these genres. We will also discuss the musical preferences of the students. We will compare and contrast similarities and differences between their musical preferences and that of their family members.

Lesson 2: An Introduction to the History and Genres of African American Music

Objective: Students will be able to identify the various African American musical genres and explain a brief history of the time period in which each genre became popular.

Materials/Resources: KWL chart, pictures of musical artists for each time period, timeline to be completed after the lesson as an assessment tool, samples of music from each genre.

Procedures: To begin, the students will be given a KWL chart. Each student will complete the K (what I know) and W (what I want to know) sections of the chart. This will allow the teacher to find out what prior knowledge the students have regarding African American musical history and genres. The teacher will also be able to gear future lessons to what the students are interested in learning about from what they provide on the W section of the chart.

After the KWL charts are completed, we will discuss what some of the students wrote in each section. The varied answers will guide this short discussion. Then, the teacher will introduce the names of the genres in order with the time periods they are from. We will discuss slave music, jazz, blues, gospel and soul, rock 'n roll, R&B and pop, and rap and hip-hop.

Slave Music: The teacher will discuss slavery during the 1800's with the students. We will discuss the harsh treatment that took place and how music helped them to survive these conditions. We will discuss and listen to examples of work songs. We will discuss how slave music emerged into American music as the slaves were freed in 1863.

Jazz: The teacher will discuss the history of jazz music and how it developed between 1890 and the early 1900's. The students will be introduced to important vocabulary in relation to jazz music such as; rhythm and improvisation. We will discuss the Harlem Renaissance in relation to the popularity of jazz. The students will be introduced to the music of artists, Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald. A brief biography on these artists will also be discussed.

Blues: The teacher will discuss the history of blues music and how it developed from work songs and spiritual songs. The students will be introduced to B.B. King and Bessie Smith. They will discuss the artists and listen to their music.

Gospel/Soul: The teacher will discuss the history of gospel and soul music. We will discuss vocal soloists and vocal and choral groups that sing gospel. We will discuss how gospel music combined with soul and listen to the music of artists James Brown and Aretha Franklin.

Rock'n Roll: The teacher will discuss the history of rock'n roll music and its creation in the 1950's. We will discuss and listen to the music of singer, songwriter, and guitarist Chuck Berry.

R & B/Pop: The teacher will discuss how many African Americans moved from the south to cities like, Chicago, New York, Detroit, and Los Angeles during the period called, "The Great Migration". At this time blues and gospel music transformed into what we know as rhythm and blues. We will discuss and listen to music from the artists, Stevie Wonder and Tina Turner. We will also discuss Michael Jackson, who is known as "The King of Pop".

Rap/Hip-Hop: This genre of music will be most familiar to the young students. We will discuss the history of rap and hip-hop. We will discuss the term rap and what it means. The students will listen to and discuss artists such as, Run DMC and Grandmaster Flash. We will also discuss more modern day artists, such as The Black Eyed Peas, Lil Bow Wow and Lil Romeo.

Assessment: At the conclusion of the lesson, we will complete a timeline as a whole class activity. We will fill in the dates of each genre and include the names of popular artists during each time period. Students will also complete a matching worksheet, where they will match the artist to the genre of music. This will be an assessment of the material covered in this lesson.

Lesson 3/ Project: Research, Reports and Oral Presentations of African American Musical Genres

Objective: Students will work in small cooperative groups to research a specific genre of African American music and orally present their information to the class.

Materials/Resources: books, magazines, Internet, compact discs, records, video

Procedures: Students will be assigned to work in small cooperative groups. Each group will consist of three students. Each group will be assigned a different genre of African American music. The genre topics will include slave music, jazz, blues, gospel/soul, rock'n roll, R&B/pop, and rap/hip-hop. The students will be required to research the history of their genre and name popular musicians from the genre. At the conclusion of their research, the students will write a report on the assigned genre. The students will give an oral presentation of their report at the conclusion of this project.

Research: Students will be required to research the history and the artists associated with their genre. We will go over how to research information on a given topic. We will explore the correct resources to use and how to use them. We will go over graphic organizers that can be used to record the information found in the research.

The students will use a variety of resources. First, we will use our school library as a resource for nonfiction books about African American musical genres and artists. The students will also be provided time to do research on the Internet in the classroom. With permission from the teachers, I will have the students use the Internet to research during one library period and one computer period in the course of this project. Students will also be able to use any resources they have access to outside of the classroom, such as a local public library, books, magazines, and encyclopedias.

Written Report: The students will be required to write a handwritten report on the musical genre they are assigned. The report will include the following information; time period of the genre, any historical events that influenced the genre, a list of popular artists of the

genre, and examples of popular songs from the genre. The report will consist of 3-5 handwritten paragraphs. One report will be required per group.

Oral Presentations: As a group, students will orally present their written report of their assigned African American musical genre. Each member of the group must orally present a section of their research. Visual aids will also be required during the presentation to supplement their presentations. It will not be required; however it will be encouraged for the students to present a piece of music from their genre for the class to listen to. I will provide the students with access to the Internet to find selections of music for their projects. Students may also bring in appropriate samples of music from home if associated with their genre.

Assessments: Students will complete a self-assessment after their oral presentations. The student will be required to rate their own performance and their contributions to the group project. Each member of a group will also be required to rate the other members of their group. This will check for accountability of each group member. Students will list what each group member did to contribute to the completion of the project.

The formal assessment will be done on a rubric for each section of the project. There will be a rubric for the report and oral presentation. Students will be assessed on the content, organization, focus, style and conventions of their written report. For the oral report, students will be assessed on their oral communication skills, preparation, and use of visual aids.

Lesson 4/Project: Biography and Oral Presentation of African American Artists

Objective: Students will write a biography and orally present their research on a popular artist of their choice from an African American musical genre.

Materials/Resources: books, magazines, Internet, compact discs, records, video

Procedures: Students will work individually on this project. Each student will choose an African American artist from one of the following genres; slave music, jazz, blues, gospel, rock 'n roll, R&B, and rap and hip-hop. The students will be required to research their artist. At the conclusion of their research, the students will write a biography on their chosen artist. The students will give an oral presentation of their biography at the conclusion of this project.

Biographies of Artists covered in the Unit:

Louis Armstrong: (1901 – 1971) Louis Armstrong was born and raised in New Orleans. He dropped out of school in third grade and soon led a vocal quartet on the street to help earn money for his family. In 1913, he was taken to a school for troubled boys and played in the school band. In 1922, Armstrong began to play with a band in Chicago and became a professional musician. Armstrong made his first recording in 1924 with his

band, The Hot Five. Armstrong came to be one of the greatest Jazz musicians in the world. Some of his recordings inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame included, “St. Louis Blues”, “What a Wonderful World”, and “West End Blues”.

Duke Ellington: (1899 – 1974) Duke Ellington was born Edward Kennedy Ellington in Washington D.C. Ellington first performed at high school dances. He moved to New York and led his own band named the Washingtonians. He became famous when he landed a gig playing the Cotton Club in Harlem. He played there with his orchestra for eleven years. Ellington was considered one of America’s greatest composers and composed over 2000 pieces of music in his lifetime. Some notable recordings were, “It Don’t Mean a Thing (If I Ain’t Got That Swing)”, “Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue”, and “Take the “A” Train”.

B. B. King: (1925 – present) Riley B. King, known as B.B. King, was born on September 16, 1925 in Mississippi. He grew up singing in the gospel choir at his church and worked as a singer and a disc jockey in his early years. He began his career in 1949 recording songs and soon assembled his own band. In the 1950’s, B.B. King became one of the most important names in R&B music. He has received many awards and honors for his music and was inducted in both the Blues Hall of Fame and Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Aretha Franklin: (1956-present) Aretha Franklin was born in Memphis, Tennessee in 1956. She is known as “The Queen of Soul”. She is a singer, songwriter and pianist. As a teenager, Franklin sang in her father’s church. She released her first solo album in 1960. She began recording her first songs for Atlantic Records in 1967. She has received many honors and rewards for her vocal performances. One of her most well known songs is “Respect”.

James Brown: (1933 – 2006) James Brown was born in South Carolina in 1933. He was a popular American singer and songwriter of the R&B, funk, and soul genres. He was known as the “Godfather of Soul”. Brown had a successful career that spanned over many decades. Brown received a variety of awards during his lifetime and after his death. He had many notable singles such as, “Papa’s Got a Brand New Bag” and “I Got You (I Feel Good)”. He has been recognized as an iconic figure of 20th century music.

Chuck Berry: (1926 – present) Chuck Berry was born in Missouri in 1926. He is well known for his song, “Johnny B. Goode”. He is an American artist, singer and composer. He was one of the first musicians to be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. He played a very significant influence on rock music.

Tina Turner: (1939 – present) Tina Turner was born as Anna Mae Bullock in Tennessee on November 26, 1939. She is an American singer, dancer and actress. She has received many awards for her music and was titled “The Queen of Rock and Roll”. She started her career by playing with her husband, Ike Turner. She reached mainstream success in

the 1960's when she recorded many popular hits such as "Proud Mary". She also released solo albums.

Michael Jackson: (1958 – 2009) Michael Jackson was born in Indiana in 1958. He began his career at age 5 as a singer in the band Jackson 5. He recorded several hit singles with the Jackson 5. His first solo album was, "Off The Wall", which broke number 1 records in the United States. He continued to make number one hits and won many awards for his music. He is known as the, "King of Pop". He was scheduled for a comeback in 2009 and suddenly died of cardiac arrest at age 50.

Grandmaster Flash: (1958 – present) Grandmaster Flash was born as Joseph Saddler on January 1, 1958. He is a well-known American hip-hop musician and D.J. In the 1970's he formed his own group, "The Grandmaster Flash & the 3 MC's". The group changed and then became known as, "The Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five". In 1979, they released their first single, "Superrappin". The group was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2007.

Research: Students will be required to research the artist in which they chose from one of the genres covered in the unit. We will discuss the information they will need to research about their artist. They will be able to record their research on graphic organizers.

The students will use a variety of resources. First, we will use our school library as a resource for nonfiction books about African American artists. The students will also be provided time to do research on the Internet in the classroom. With permission from the teachers, I will have the students use the Internet to research during one library period and one computer period in the course of this project. Students will also be able to use any resources they have access to outside of the classroom, such as a local public library, books, magazines, and encyclopedias.

Biography: The students will be required to write a biography on an artist from one of the genres covered in this unit. The artist should be a popular artist that is famously associated with a specific genre of music. The biography will include; date of birth and death if applicable, information regarding the early years or childhood of the artist, how they became famous, time period in which they became famous and popular songs from the artist. A photograph or picture of the artist should be included. Each student should also choose one piece of music from their artist to play for the class.

Oral Presentations: Each student will be required to orally present their biographies on the African American artist of their choice. The student must include a picture or pictures of the artist and a piece of music performed by the artist to supplement their biographies.

Assessment: The formal assessment will be done on a rubric for each section of the project. There will be a rubric for the report and oral presentation. Students will be assessed on the content, organization, focus, style and conventions of their written report. For the oral report, students will be assessed on their oral communication skills, preparation, and use of visual aids.

Bibliography/Resources

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Teacher Resources

PBS Kids Jazz Site. <http://www.pbskids.org/jazz/index.html>
Website on Jazz music for students with available lesson plans and activities.

Time for Kids. www.timeforkids.com
Website with links to past articles on African American Music for Black History Month.

Student Resources

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Content Standards

Standards: The Philadelphia Public Schools Core Curriculum is aligned to the Pennsylvania State Standards. The following standards within the areas of Arts and Humanities and Literacy will be utilized:

Arts and Humanities:

9.2 Historical and Cultural Contexts

- 9.2.3.A Explain the historical, cultural, and social context of an individual work in the arts.
- 9.2.3.B Relate works in the arts chronologically to historical events.
- 9.2.3.C Relate works in the arts to varying styles and genre and to the periods in which they were created.
- 9.2.3.D Analyze a work of art from its historical and cultural perspective.
- 9.2.3.E Analyze how historical events and culture impact forms, techniques and purposes of works in the arts.
- 9.2.3.F Know and apply appropriate vocabulary used between social studies and the arts and humanities.
- 9.2.3.G Relate works in the arts to geographic regions.
- 9.2.3.J Identify, explain and analyze historical and cultural differences as they relate to works in the arts.
- 9.2.3.K Identify, explain and analyze traditions as they relate to works in the arts.

Literacy:

1.3 Reading, Analyzing and Interpreting Literature

- 1.3.3.A Read and understand works of literature.

1.4 Types of Writing

- 1.4.3.B Write informational pieces using illustrations when relevant.

1.6 Speaking and Listening

- 1.6.3.D Contribute to discussions.
- 1.6.3.E Participate in small and large group discussions and presentations.
- 1.6.3.F Use media for learning purposes.

1.8 Research

- 1.8.3.B Locate information using appropriate sources and strategies.
- 1.8.4. C Organize and present the main ideas from research.