

Moved by the Music: A Musical Journey in West African and African American Music

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Overview

African music, which is nearly always coupled with some other art form, expresses the feeling of life of the entire community. The sound of feet pounding the ground becomes the rhythm of the music whose notes are in turn transformed into dance steps.

Francis Bebey, African Musician & Scholar

We love the music. We love the beat; we can move to it. But where does it come from? We never think of that when we are listening to music. Maybe we might hear an ancient beat that resonates within, but the investigative thought about where it originated quickly vanishes. We just want to listen. Great! That is the starting point to get students interested in the roots of the music they are listening to and give them a greater appreciation and respect for Black music and its origins. Children are surrounded by music at home, with friends, and in school. Do they ever really think about the origins of the music they listen to or its historical roots? Yet, the music resonates within them and it moves them. The movement and the music are tied together to their roots.

The purpose of this unit is to explore the music of West Africa and the rich contributions it has made to contemporary African American music. Through lessons and listening activities students will gain knowledge and appreciation of the musical contribution that African music has made over time across the Atlantic and into our own homes. Tracing the roots of African music we find that there is so much beauty in this cultural music that we can learn from. The forced immigrants of slavery reinforced their connections to the Old World. In reenacting ancient rites and customs by mixing language and music, and the new culture with the old, an entirely new expression of culture and music developed.

Presently Pennsylvania State Standards do not include a deeper look at African

musical and cultural contributions for grades K through 2. This unit will serve to introduce African culture, musical instruments, and the many styles of singing that originate from the continent of Africa. Students will take a closer look at the continent and history of Africa and its people. They will brainstorm where the people of African would have gotten their inspiration for the music they made. How did they know what to play, and what did they use for instruments? Laying the ground-work of African music through these lessons, students will gain a deeper appreciation and understanding of how the music of Africa has traveled across continents and contributed and influenced the music we listen to today.

Rationale

Music - it is a primal force within us, our breath, our heart, all move to a rhythm, just as the earth and the weather around it does. Musical traditions have carried the human race through trials and tribulations as old as man himself. Though the cultures and language of distant lands may be foreign to many of us, the universal language of music is in our hearts and souls, and runs through our blood. When we listen to a piece of music something resonates within us. Children are naturally curious. Music is a wonderful introduction into the cultural riches and musical traditions that the African people brought with them to their new homeland. Sadly, today some of the contemporary music that is popular sends the wrong message to our youth. Though it is almost impossible to censor what children are listening to today, I have found that if they are exposed to a rich variety of music and exposed to the musical traditions of other cultures, they not only gain a seasoned ear, but a deeper appreciation for their own and other cultural contributions they might not have been aware of.

The purpose of this unit is to take students on a musical journey that explores the music of West and Central Africa and the rich contributions it has made over time to the many styles of music we hear today. It is aligned with the Pennsylvania Core Curriculum Standards for Literacy, Social Studies, and Math. Tapping into the musical traditions of Africa and learning the historical context of some of the popular music we hear today will help to broaden student's musical and cultural appreciation.

This unit will be implemented for a kindergarten class where students range in ages 5 to 6 years. Patterson school has a 98% ratio of African American students. In my kindergarten class, three of these students are first generation American citizens with parents that were born in different countries on the continent of Africa. All of the students are very excited to learn about music from Africa.

Music plays an important role in the development of children. Today's youth are not often exposed to the music of other cultures and are too often subject to what is fed to them through the mass media. Popular music is motivated more by money than art or culture. The American cultural music we hear is often a rough mix of gender violence, and the wrong images of men and women. The most popular forms of music among our youth are too often the worse offender. This in itself presents a strong need for young children to be exposed to a rich diversity of musical experiences that would encourage

them to develop a strong sense of musical judgment and a sense of identity and self-esteem that is positive and healthy. Music is an excellent portal that can bring value to cultural identity and introduce a rich variety of musical traditions. Children are usually not aware of their cultural heritage or that it has any value. They know they might eat or speak differently, but they know little of their cultural roots. By using music as a portal to compare and contrast popular African American music to African musical traditions students can gain an appreciation of the richness of these cultures in a more meaningful way.

In this unit for a kindergarten class I have focused on: ears/on – minds/on – hands/on activities that will serve to deepen musical and cultural appreciation. This curriculum unit is intended to explore African and African American music while enriching literacy lessons about communities, introduce new vocabulary words, and deepen social studies lessons about the land, the people, the customs of various countries in Africa, and the musical contributions it has made to African American music. Though this unit is written for a kindergarten class it can be adapted and used to deepen understanding and appreciation of this genre of music for higher grades.

Objectives

Music plays an enormous role in childhood experiences and into adulthood. We shape ourselves through the music we hear. Historically and culturally it is a way for people to express themselves. Often African American children are not aware of the cultural contributions that have traveled across land and sea from the continent of Africa. Guided by the Pennsylvania Standards (see appendix) this unit will deepen student's knowledge and understanding about the continent of Africa and the musical contributions of Africa and its historical roots in African American music.

Students will:

- Listen to a variety of music from various countries in Africa
- Listen to a variety of music of African American artists, past and present, and some global artists
- Listen and compare voice, rhythm, pitch and style
- Listen and compare musical instruments from several West African countries to America and beyond
- Identify musical instruments (some instruments will be brought to class)
- Research music from West Africa (using the web & books)
- Research African American musical artists (using the web & books)
- Understand genre, harmony, and rhythm
- Understand and be able to count out various rhythms and beats
- Create music of their own with instruments they make from rudimentary objects such as boxes, rubber bands, cups full of beans, etc.

Strategies

To make this a hands-on, minds-on learning experience, students will have access to listening stations, book baskets with books about music and musicians from Africa and America, and musical instruments. The students will also make musical instruments from rudimentary objects, like boxes, rubber bands, beans and cans, etc.

Students will listen to a variety of music from West Africa and African American artists. Students will gather information about musical instruments and various styles of singing using listening stations, web resources and books, as well as teacher led instruction. Students will do activities to help them understand the musical contributions from West and Central Africa that comprise the music they hear today.

Teachers will use questions to get students to share and question their comprehension process before, during, and after reading to help them make connections, predictions, inferences, recall and visualize characters, setting, and the main idea, and to help them understand and appreciate the contributions of Africa and African American musical artists. Teachers will scaffold prompting and offer assistance with getting the students to share their thinking and learn from each other by asking them to share questions about the topic, the main idea, and what the author was trying to teach us. They will also listen to music from these genres and be able to identify voices, words, instruments and beats of the music.

Students will engage in a variety of activities:

- Identifying countries on a map
- What You Know, What You Want to know, What You've Learned
- Listening and responding to a Variety of Music (see lesson plans & music list)
- Comparing and Contrasting music from two Continents and beyond (including the Caribbean Islands).
- Reading and Identifying the African and African American instruments, music and musicians
- Graphic Organizers – Where, When, How, Who, What
- Research/Write/Illustrate to demonstrate knowledge

Classroom Activities

Students will engage in a variety of *ears on/minds on/hands on activities* to deepen their learning and appreciation of African and African American music.

- Students will listen to stories about African and African American musicians, they will engage in teacher lead questions before and after reading
- Independent reading with Book Baskets about Africa and African music and musicians
- Listening station

- Big Board comparing and contrasting African and American culture – What's the

Same & What is different

- Big Board comparing musical instruments and singing styles of Africa and America
- Students will use drawings and words to describe various aspects of what they have learned
- Storyboards, block box, story webs and sentence strips will be incorporated into the lessons for student's interactive learning
- Students will retell a story using words and pictures
- Research/artists and music using books and the web (resources provided)

Whole class/group project:

- Time line of West African rhythms to hip hop (teacher led on board or block paper)
- Students will construct instruments from rudimentary objects and create their own music
- Celebration program: Students will learn and sing a song from West Africa and a contemporary song from a popular African American Artist - Students may wear African outfits for culminating class performance project

Lesson Plans

Lesson 1

Subject: Where is Africa/What does African music sound like?

Literacy, Social Studies, Math – Introduction to the cultural and musical traditions of the people of Africa (This lesson may be done over several periods using various books and music to deepen the lesson).

Objective - Students will:

- * Locate the continent of Africa on a world map and globe
- * Locate countries within the continent of Africa
- * Listen to a story
- * Listen to music from various parts of Africa
- * Be able to identify the various instruments they hear e.g. drums, bells, voices, flutes, etc.

Goals- Students will know and identify:

- * That the world is composed of continents
- * That there are different countries within a continent
- * That there are different people groups within a continent
- * Be able to identify music from various countries of the continent of Africa

Materials-

- * World map and globe
- * Stickers or pins to locate countries on a map
- * Books and music (CD's, Web)
- * *"To Be A Drum,"* by Evelyn Coleman

- * <http://pbskids.org/africa>
- * <http://african-drumbeat.co.uk>
- * <http://kusumgboo.com> (Beyond the village)

Method-

- * Pre-reading questions
- * Introduce book
- * Read aloud

Post-reading questions:

- Where did this story take place?
- Who were the characters in this story?
- What happened in this story?
- What instruments did you learn about in this story?

Activities-

- * Students will listen to music from Africa
- * Students will try closing their eyes to identify the instruments and/or vocals they hear
- * Students will experiment with counting and tapping out beats

Closure-

- * Students will illustrate a drum and write the sounds for the beats

Lesson 2

(extended lesson to include African American pop artist)

Subject: African American Songs and Lullabies

Social Studies & Literacy

Objective - Students Will:

- * Listen to songs and lullabies
- * Gain knowledge and understanding of the cultural origins of these songs

Goals - Students will:

- * Learn/recall songs and lullabies
- * Sing along
- * Use these songs in small and whole group activities
- * Understand the historical context of these songs

Materials-

- * "Shake It To The One That You Love Best" - Play Songs and Lullabies from Black Musical Traditions, by Cheryl Warren Mattox
- * "Rockin-Robin" by Michael Jackson
- * Jump Ropes
- * Jacks and Balls

Method-

- * Pre-reading questions
- * Introduce book
- * Read A-loud
- * Teacher led questions/scaffolding
- * Student's participation

Activities-

- * Pair and share songs: (in the classroom, school yard or gym)
- * Class instruments (drum, tambourine, shakers, wooden sticks, etc.)
- * Jump rope
- * Hand slapping
- * Knee clapping
- * Whole group game

Closure-

- * Make up our own class rhyme and/or song

STORY REFLECTIONS

Draw a picture about the story

Who is the main Character?

Two words describing the setting

Three words describing what this book is about

“ROCKIN ROBIN”

Performed by Michael Jackson
Songwriter: Jimmie Thomas

He rocks in the treetops all day long
Hoppin' and a-boppin' and singing his song
All the little birdies on Jaybird Street
Love to hear the robin go tweet tweet tweet
Rockin' robin, rock rock
Rockin' robin Blow rockin' robin 'Cause we're really gonna rock tonight
Every little swallow, every chick-a-dee
Every little bird in the tall oak tree
The wise old owl, the big black crow
Flappin' their wings singing go bird go
Rockin' robin, rock rock Rockin' robin
Blow rockin' robin 'Cause we're really gonna rock tonight'
Yeah, yeah
Pretty little raven at the bird's bandstand
Told them how to do the bop and it was grand
They started going steady and bless my soul
He out-bopped the buzzard and the oriole
He rocks in the treetops all day long
Hoppin' and a boppin' and singing his song
All the little birdies on Jaybird Street
Love to hear the robin go tweet tweet tweet tweet
Rockin' robin, rock rock Rockin' robin Blow rockin' robin
'Cause we're really gonna rock tonight

Web Resources

- * <http://www.afropop.org>
- * <http://www.beacon.org/soundsofslavery/>
- * <http://learningtogive.org/lessons/music>
- * <http://trumpet.sdsu.edu/M345/African-Music1.html>
- * <http://www.jao.com/africa/index.html>
- * [http://www.ibike.org/library/africakids\(games,books,fun\)](http://www.ibike.org/library/africakids(games,books,fun))
- * <http://www.masabo.com>
- * <http://www.metrolyrics.com/rockin-robin-lyrics-michael>
- * [Memory.loc.gov/diglib/ihas \(African American Performers 1892-1916\)](http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/ihas)
- * <http://www.pbs.org/africa/mask>
- * <http://pbskids.org/africa/piano>
- * <http://african-drumbeat.co.uk>
- * <http://youtube.com/Louis Jordan/Big Bess>
- * <http://youtube.com/LouisJordan/Caldonia>
- * <http://www.youtube.com/Nas & Damian Marley Ft Knaan-Africa Must Wake Up>
- * <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African-American-music>
- * <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/lohtml>
- * <http://www.youtube.com/watch/afrodrumming>
- * [www.afrodrumming.com \(oldest footage of African drumming\)](http://www.afrodrumming.com)
- * www.randyweston.info/randy-weston/African Rhythms
- * www.youtube.com/HowtoplayAfricanDrums
- * www.kusumgboo.com/Audio&Video.html

- * [http://www.videocure.com/video/133907\(MichaelJackson\)](http://www.videocure.com/video/133907(MichaelJackson))
- * <http://www.youtube.com/Wynton Marsalis/Portrait of Louis Armstrong>
- * <http://www.youtube.com/Martha's Boogie>
- * [http://www.youtube.com/Queen Ifrica-\"MontegoBay, Rise Ghetto Youth\"](http://www.youtube.com/Queen Ifrica-\)

Discography:

Black Composers. Music Masters CD 06931

Carribbean Island Music. Nonsuch Explorer Series, 720-47-2

Gambia: The Art of the Kora, Ocora 580027

Jackson, Michael. “Rockin' Robin,” Got to Be There/Forever. Universal Music Group International, 1999.

Master Drummers of Dagbon. Rounder CD 5016 and CD 5017

Audio Tapes and Recordings:

Afro-American Music and Its Roots.

Voices of the Civil Rights Movement: Black American Freedom Songs, 1960-1966. Various artists, Smithsonian Folkways.

Southern Journey, Volume 1: Voices from the American South: Blues, Ballads, Hymns, Reels, Shouts Chantey and Work Songs, Rounder Series, Alan Lomax.

Yoruba Drums of Benin, West Africa. Various artists, Smithsonian Folkways SF40440.

Annotated Bibliography:

Teachers Reading List

Berlin, Ira. The Making of African America: The Four Great Migrations. New York: Viking, 2010.
History of the four great migrations.

Callingham, Glyn and Graham Marsh. The Cover Art of Blue Note Records. Collins & Brown, London, 2010.
A complete collection of Blue Note Record cover art with over 400 photographs.

Christian, Charles M. Black Saga, the African American Experience: A Chronology.

Civitas/Counterpoint, NY, 1995.
500 years of African American History brought to life through words and pictures.

Darby, Derrick and Tommie Shelby. Hip Hop & Philosophy: Rhyme 2 Reason. Carus Publishing Company, 2005.

These authors show how the rhymes of hip-hop can be mastered and mixed to contemplate life's most profound mysteries.

Perretti, Burton. Lift Every Voice: The History of African American Music. New York: Rowman & Little field, 2009.

Ramsey, Guthrie. Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip- Hop. Berkley: University of California Press, 2003.

Beginning with Jazz, rhythm and blues, and gospel, Ramsey illustrates how knowledge of musical forms and styles of African American musical traditions were passed down transcending the boundaries between genres and generations.

Snitzer, Herb. Glorious Days and Nights: A Jazz Memoir. University Press of Mississippi, 2011.

50 years of Jazz, plus photographs of the best of Snitzer.

Southern, Eileen and Josephine Wright, compilers. African-American Traditions in Song, Sermon, Tale, and Dance, 1600s to 1920: An Annotated Bibliography of Literature Collections and Artwork. Greenwood Press, Westport CT, 1990.

Tate. Eleanora E. Black Stars – African American Musicians. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 2000.

Biographical profiles of African Americans, both legendary and less well- known musicians who have contributed to American music over the past 200 years.

Teachout, Terry. Pops: A Life of Louis Armstrong. Mariner Books, 2010.

A comprehensive biography of an important figure in jazz and American culture.

Annotated Student Bibliography

Coleman, Evelyn. To Be A Drum. Albert Whitman & Company, 1998.

Past, present and future blend together to bring sound of sound of the beating drums from Africa. Colorfully blending the story of the middle passage, slavery, the civil-rights struggle, black artists, teachers, heroes and children as they weave the story of music and hope. Illustrations by Brenda Lynn Robinson.

London, Jonathan. Hip Cat. Raincoast Books, Vancouver,BC, 1993.

Jazzy words and colorful illustrations to bring the sounds of jazz alive. Illustrations by Woodleigh Hubbard.

Mattox, Cheryl Warren. Shake It To The One That You Love Best - Play Songs and Lullabies from Black Musical Traditions. Warren – Mattox Productions 1989.
Black childhood traditional songs and lullabies with musical scores and historical background information. Illustrations: Varnetta P. Honeywood & Brenda Joysmith.

Monceaux, Morgan. Jazz: My Music, My People. Alfred A. Knopf, 1994.
Introduction to African American Jazz for young children.

Overbey, Theresa. Michael Jackson. Mitchell Lane Publishers, Hockessin, DE 2004.
Life and music of Michael Jackson.

Pinkney, Andrea Davis. Duke Ellington: The life, Times & Music. Hyperion Books for Children. NY 1998.
African American musical history with colorful woodcut art illustrations. Pinkney also has other books on Black American musical artists. Illustrator: Brian Pinkney.

Rapport, Doreen. No More – Stories & Songs of Slave Resistance. Candlewick Press, Somerville, MA 2002.
History and songs of the slave resistance.

Raschak, Chris. Charlie Parker played be-bop. Scholastic, originally published by Orchard Books, 1992.
Jazzy sounds and colorful illustrations bring the story of an African American musician to life.

Raschka, Chris. Mysterious Thelonious. Orchard Books, NY (Scholastic, Inc.) 1997.
Jazzy scales to sing along with and colorfully jazzy watercolors.

Troupe, Quincy. Little Stevie Wonder. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston 2005.
Colorful and playful with the life and songs of Stevie Wonder. Includes CD.
Illustrator: Lisa Cohen.

Winter, Jonah. Dizzy. Scholastic, NY, NY, 2006.
A story about a boy who breaks the rules and ends up head of the class with colorful illustrations (by Illustrator Sean Qualls) and sound words.

Appendix

Content Standards

Literacy

- 1.1 Learning to Read Independently: Identify purpose and common words, read independently.
- 1.1KG Fact/Fiction: Understand and be able to identify the difference between fact and fiction.
- 1.2 Reading Critically: Recall content; be able to differentiate between a variety of genres.
- 1.3 Reading, Analyzing and Interpreting Literature: Describe characters, setting and main idea. Be able to identify rhyme and repetition, patterns in dialogue and discuss a variety of literature.
- 1.3K Reading and Interpreting Literature: Understand words and be able to describe meaning.
- 1.3KC Rhythm and Rhyme: Recite and understand rhythms and rhymes.
- 1.4KB Draw/Write to inform: Use words and drawing to express understanding.
- 1.5 Quality of Writing: Organize words into complete sentences using correct grammar and punctuation.
- 1.6 Speaking and Listening: Follow directions, restate, share information and ideas, develop speaking skills and respond to media.
- 1.7 Character and Function of the English Language: Recognize variations in dialogue.
- 1.8 Research: Use books, video and audio to find and relate important concepts related to main idea.

Social Studies

- 5.2 Rights and Responsibilities of Citizens: Know that people in communities have responsibilities and rights and be able to name some.
- 7.1 Physical Characteristics of Places and Regions: Be able to describe physical characteristics of a place.
- 7.3 The Human Characteristics of Places and Regions: Understand that cultures and

people groups vary from place to place, yet all humans share basic characteristics.

7.3B Basic Geography: Locate and name various continents around the globe.

Math

2.1 Numbers and Number Systems and Relationships.

2.2 Computation and Estimation: Use counting and estimation skills to arrive at conclusions.

2.6 Statistics and Data Analysis: Collect data, form and justify opinions based on data.