



## **Learning objectives:**

- Trace the evolution of African American music traditions from folk songs to modern forms of music like the Blues and Rap.
- Identify and explain the use of coded messages in traditional African American folk songs.

## **Essential question:**

How do people use music to send messages to one another? How does music help people cope with difficult situations?

## **Arkansas Frameworks:**

### **Social Studies**

- H.12.1.1.-H.12.4.1: Create historical narratives using chronological sequences of related events in Arkansas and the United States.
- H.12.1.2.-H.12.4.2: Interpret timelines that show relationships among people, events, and movements at the local, state, regional, and national level.
- H.12.1.3-H.12.4.3: Compare specific regions of the United States in the past with those regions today nothing changes over time.

### **Music/Fine Arts**

- CR. 3. 1. 1: Apply, with limited guidance, personal, peer, or teacher feedback to personal musical ideas.
- CN.10.1.1: Identify a personal experience that could form the basis of a song.
- CN.11.1.2: Connect music from various cultures, historical periods, and/or events by listening, singing, moving, or playing.

## **Common Core Standards:**

**Reading:** CCRA.R.1, CCRA.R. 2, CCRA.R.3, CCRA.R.5, CCRA.R.7, CCRA.R.9, CCRA.R.10

**Writing:** CCRA. W. 2, CCRA.W. 3, CCRA.W.4, CCRA.W. 7, CCRA.W.8, CCRA.W.9

**Speaking and Listening:** CCRA.SL.1, CCRA.SL. 2, CCRA.SL.4, CCRA.SL.5, CCRA.SL.6

## **Additional Texts (Optional):**

- *Freedom Song: The Story of Henry "Box" Brown* by Sally Walker.
- *Before John was a Jazz Giant* by Carole Boston Weatherford
- *Skit-Scat Raggedy Cat: Ella Fitzgerald* by Roxane Orgill

## **Activities:**

- Reading exercise with assessment questions
- Create your own coded message song.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Song Lab

**Directions** | You have been given the task of creating your own music album that uses elements of African American traditional music. There are four parts to this project.

1. Create the lyrics to one song. Your lyrics must have a coded message.
2. Write a description of your song lyrics explaining the coded message of the song.
3. Create an album cover. The picture on your album cover must represent the song that you wrote.
4. Write an album track list that includes at least five songs. You do not need to write five songs, but you do need to include the song titles.

For more information on our classroom resources or to book a field trip to the Delta Cultural Center, call Ron Kelley (870)0338-4350 or email [Ronald@arkansasheritage.org](mailto:Ronald@arkansasheritage.org).

## Track List

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

By: \_\_\_\_\_



## **Folk Spirituals**

When enslaved Africans were exposed to Christianity, many accepted some aspects of it and rejected others in a process known as **syncretism**. Syncretism is when parts of two or more religions combine to make a new way to worship. Enslaved Africans came to the New World with the knowledge of one way of expressing religious fervor that involved responding verbally, singing, dancing, and shouting.

They sought privacy when worshipping because some slave owners forbade them to worship in this way. They met in "**invisible churches**" in ravines, forests, fields, slave quarters, and anywhere else they could that was away from the critical eyes and ears of European Americans. Invisible churches were meant to be secret places where slaves could express their own thoughts and identities. Invisible churches helped preserve many elements of African culture for many enslaved Africans. Their church meetings involved prayer, singing, hand clapping, dancing, telling personal spiritual experiences, and sometimes shouting and preaching. Prayer often turned into singing, and the congregation was encouraged to respond verbally to what was going on at all times.

The **call-and-response** pattern of singing was the basis for the spiritual and is one cultural trait that has flourished everywhere the people of Western and Central African countries have gone. In this pattern, the soloist sings something different each time, changing the words and the melody, but the group sings the same response, chorus, or refrain after each solo. This musical pattern can go on **indefinitely**. Some early church meetings lasted all night. The solo-group pattern illustrates a **society** in which the success of the individual and the idea of diversity are celebrated by the group. The texts for call and response spirituals were often taken from European hymns.

## **Vocabulary**

*Syncretism*: Taking parts of two or more religions and using them to make a new religion or practice.

*Invisible churches*: Secret church services often held by slaves.

*Call-and-response*: a song pattern where one person sings a line and the chorus sings a response. Very popular among African American slave communities.

*Indefinitely*: Could go on forever.

*Society*: A group of people who have the same traditions, beliefs, and language.

Drums were banned by many slave owners because they were believed to be used to send signals. African Americans still “drummed” with their feet and used body movements to keep drumming styles alive as a part of religious singing and worship. The “**ringing shout**” is a shuffling circle dance that involves clapping. It was performed with lively spirituals. The ring shout is related to spiritual practices in West Africa.

*Ringin' shout:* A circle dance that involves clapping. Performed by many African American communities in the 1800s.

Spirituals were not just sung for worship. They were also sung in work gangs to keep everyone working at the same speed. Sometimes they were coded with messages about impending escape attempts, directions for how to head north on the **Underground Railroad**, or which houses were safe havens while traveling. Spirituals containing messages include “Go Down, Moses” and “Follow the Drinking Gourd.” The texts of most spirituals were based on biblical passages. On the surface, a text might be about Moses leading the Hebrews out of exile, but the message applied well to enslaved Africans who yearned for the “promised land” of the North and freedom found there.

*Underground Railroad:* A secret route slaves used to travel to the North and Canada to escape slavery.

Adapted from *African American Music: Spirituals and Gospel Music* (Silver Burdett, Making Music) by Lisa Lacefield

## Reading Check

1. What are two activities people did at invisible churches?

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2. Why did many slave owners ban the use of drums?

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## The Blues

After the **American Civil War** (1860-1865), freed African Americans had many more freedoms and opportunities. New forms of music emerged as former slaves had the ability to travel, form new communities, and worship how they wanted.

One form of music created after the Civil War is called "**the Blues**." The blues began in the 1890s as a way for individuals to sing about their problems. Blues songs often helped African Americans express the problems they faced due to **segregation**. Sometimes the songs seem very sad or angry, but they are supposed to be funny. Some people believed that singing sad songs could make a person feel happier by ridding them of "the blues."

In the early 1900s, most blues musicians played by themselves. Many of the early blues musicians, like Robert Johnson and Blind Lemon Johnson, traveled around the Mississippi Delta with their guitars playing music in many small towns. In the 1930s and 1940s, blues music became popular in many cities like Chicago and Kansas City.

Until the 1960s, many blues songs contained coded messages like the call-and-response songs sung in the 1800s. Blues singers used coded messages to talk about political, social, and economic problems caused by segregation and **Jim Crow laws**.

*American Civil War:* A war fought in the United States from 1860 to 1865 over the issue of slavery.

*The Blues:* A type of music that emphasizes problems.

*Segregation:* A policy of keeping people separated based on race.

*Jim Crow laws:* Laws passed by many states in the 1900s to make segregation legal. Overturned by the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

### Reading Check

1. What are "the blues?" \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Why did many blues songs contain coded messages?

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