

Lesson: Blues Composition/Performance

Subject: Honors Music Theory

Class Description: Grades 10-12, 22 students

Duration of Lesson: 5 days

Lesson Rationale: Functional harmony has played a large role in the class throughout the school year thus far, and now students will have a chance to use it practically and creatively by working in groups to create a blues song.

Materials:

Students: Instruments, Blues handouts, Pencil

Objectives:

- Students will understand the blues, both musically and historically.
- Students will collaborate to create a piece of music.
- Students will evaluate each other's compositions during the performance day.

New Jersey Core Curriculum Standards:

STANDARD 1.1 (Aesthetics) All students will use aesthetic knowledge in the creation of and in response to dance, music, theater, and visual art.

STANDARD 1.2 (Creation and Performance) All students will utilize those skills, media, methods, and technologies appropriate to each art form in the creation, performance, and presentation of dance, music, theater, and visual art.

STANDARD 1.3 (Elements and Principles) All students will demonstrate an understanding of the elements and principles of dance, music, theater, and visual art.

STANDARD 1.4 (Critique) All students will develop, apply and reflect upon knowledge of the process of critique.

STANDARD 1.5 (History/Culture) All students will understand and analyze the role, development, and continuing influence of the arts in relation to world cultures, history, and society.

Procedure:

Prior Knowledge: Diatonic triads within a major key, triad inversions, four part voicing, rhythm, basic song structure.

Anticipatory Set: We have been learning about diatonic triads in various major and minor keys. How do we use these in music?

Lecture:

Day 1 – Blues – History and structure:

Class will begin with a brief lesson on the history of the blues; what it means, where it evolved from, where it evolved to. Class listening will focus on the work of Robert Johnson and Muddy Waters. Afterwards, we will discuss the 12 Bar Blues structure as well as the blues scale. Any remaining time will be used to have a class-sized jam session (at least for those students who remembered their instruments).

Days 2 - 4 – Blues – Composition:

Class will begin with another class-sized jam session. After reviewing the blues structure, I will split the class up into five groups to begin work on their blues composition. Students will be grouped by instrument and heterogeneously by achievement level. They will work on their own for the rest of the period. Students will continue working in class on their composition for the next two days, in class and at home. Students will be encouraged to create a band name, a song name, and cool “bluesy” nicknames. The performance will be at the end of the following week.

Day 5 – Performance:

Each group will perform their composition in front of the class. Accommodations will be made for students who are too uncomfortable to do so.

Students will evaluate each other’s performances, anonymously, in terms of preparedness, aesthetic, and creativity.

Assessment:

Student Evaluation: Quality and preparedness of composition, thoughtfulness of peer evaluations..

Vocabulary: Blues scale, 12-bar blues, swing rhythm, chorus (song structure), AAB structure.

Accommodations:

Students with excessive stage fright will have the option to either record their performance or write a paper about the history and impact of the blues.