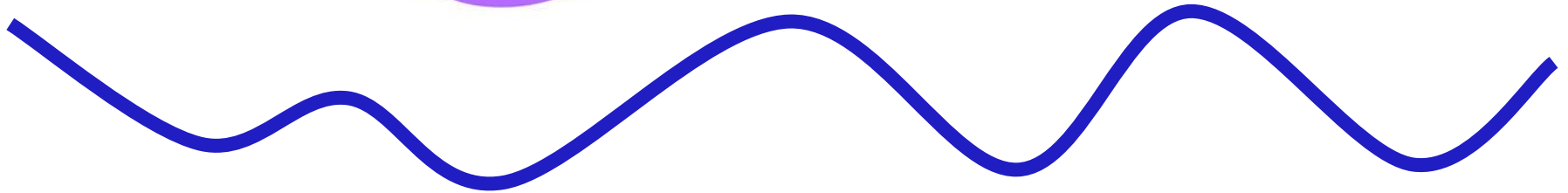


Singing the

Blues





Part 1: Explore the Blues



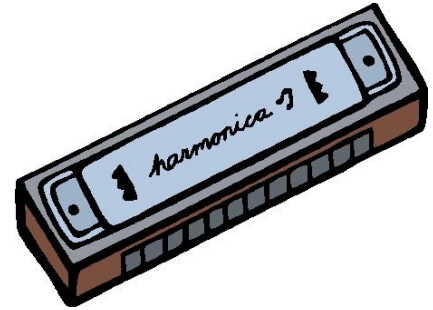
What is the Blues?

- ★ A genre of music that originated in the northern Mississippi Delta after the Civil War
- ★ Music with a common theme of sorrow, trouble, and bad luck
- ★ Uses a call-and-response style that sprang from the “work songs” of slaves and black people experiencing difficult lives
- ★ Laid the foundation for country, rock and roll, jazz, hip hop, and many other major forms of music since then



Listen to this slave song recorded in the 1940s. You can hear the call-and response style very clearly with one voice (solo) calling out a line and the other voices responding.

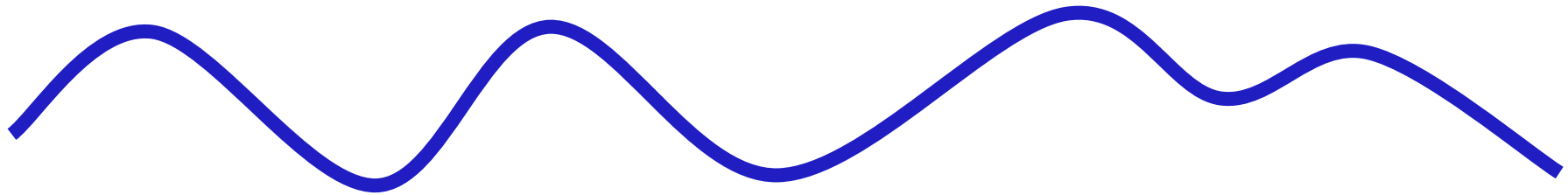
Instruments of the Blues



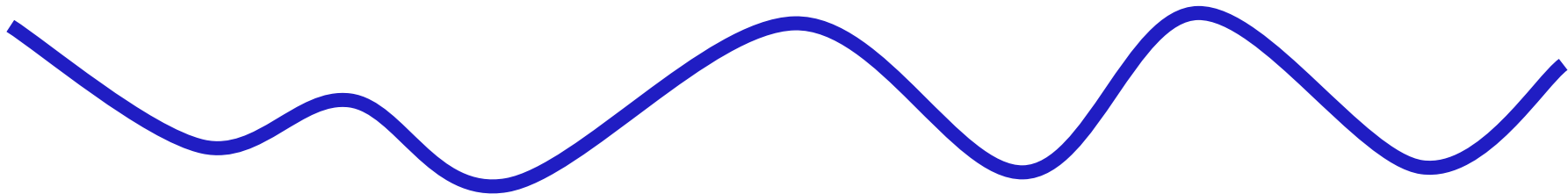
- ★ Features voice, guitar, drums, harmonica, Hammond B3 organ
- ★ Homemade and makeshift instruments such as spoons, washboards, and kazoos were used early on
- ★ The call and response can be done between different instruments or between voice and instruments



Here's a [recording](#) by Blues legends Albert Collins and B.B. King. Pay attention to the list of struggles in the song and the way the voice and instruments alternate (call and response).



Part 2: Write the Blues



Why write a Blues song?

- ★ Blues songs tell stories about life experiences, particularly about hard times and heartbreak.
- ★ The Blues is a way to express emotions and to feel better about your troubles.
- ★ The Blues can help you relate to others and others relate to you around common problems.



How do you write the Blues?

- ★ Is there something in your life that upsets or annoys you? Then you can write a Blues song!
- ★ This set of worksheets will walk you step-by-step through the process of writing your song. It's actually pretty fun!



Write your own BLUES lyrics

Step #1: Think of a topic for your Blues and give your Blues song a catchy title.

Examples: "The Slow Internet Blues," "The No Good Snacks Blues," or "I Need a Haircut Blues." Try to be original! Or use one of these if you are stuck.

Your Turn!

What is the name of your Blues song?

"THE _____ BLUES"

Step #2: Brainstorm all the things that are wrong within your Blues topic. Come up with four "problems."

For example, if I'm writing "The No Good Snacks Blues," the problems could be:

1. Someone ate the last bagel
2. I spilled all the chips
3. The bananas are bad
4. No groceries until the weekend






Part 3: Sing the Blues



Bring your Blues to life!

- ★ Using this [Blues backing track](#), you are going to improvise (make up) a melody for the words you wrote. Don't panic--this is easier than it sounds, and there are no wrong notes or rhythms!
- ★ This is a 12-bar Blues which means that the music pattern repeats every 12 bars (measures). This particular track has an intro, then the first set of 12 bars begins at 0:22. Each bar is four beats, so if you count to four 12 times, the pattern will begin again. Also, the drums signal the end of the pattern each time. Do you hear it? Can you figure out how far into the track does the second set of 12 bars begin? Listen to me count along with it and see if you matched up.

How to sing with the track

- ★ Begin your vocals at 0:22, after the intro (the drums to give a signal!)
- ★ Pick out any pitch you hear and sing your words on that pitch. As the chords change, you can sing different notes if you want.
- ★ Right now, your song has one verse and a chorus. The verse will take up the first 12 bars and the chorus will take the second 12 bars. After that, feel free to repeat the chorus with more emotion, or sing the whole song again. And don't worry if you can't remember what you sang the first time--each time should be different!
- ★  Listen to me sing “The No Good Snacks Blues” to hear an example. Notice that there is a lot of “wait time” between phrases because of the call-and-response style.

Share the Blues

- ★ I would LOVE to see or hear your work! Send me your written lyrics or a recording of you singing your Blues song to leah.inger@k12.dc.gov.
- ★ Extend your Blues by coming up with four more problems and adding a second verse.

