



New Harmonies: Celebrating American Roots Music

Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service and
Mississippi Humanities Council

STRUMMING and HUMMING...
Lesson Plans: Suggested Grades 4-7

Lesson Objectives

- Explore the various instruments used for American Roots Music

Time Frame: 2 hours

Curriculum Standards for Social Studies (National Council for Social Studies)

Standard 1: *Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.*

Mississippi Social Studies Framework: www.mde.k12.ms.us

Social Studies, 4 th grade:	Competency 1. d. Competency 3. a. Competency 5. b.
Social Studies, 6 th grade:	Competency 2. b.
Visual & Performing Arts, 4 th grade:	Competency 1. c., e., f. Competency 2. c., d. Competency 4. c. Competency 6. a., b.
Visual & Performing Arts, 5 th - 8 th :	Competency 1. c. Competency 2. b. Competency 6. a., b., d.

Supplies:

- Copies of the Instrument quiz
- 3 x 5 cards (one per student)
- Real samples of any instruments that are available (see the music teacher; bring metal spoons from home; the bottom of a bucket makes a good drum; sticks; Wal-Mart has lots of instruments really cheap; try to borrow a small guitar or ukulele... these can easily be toys, not the real thing; combs and waxpaper).
- CD with songs of roots music
 - "The Thrill is Gone" B.B. King (Blues)
<http://play.rhapsody.com/bbking/bbboogie/thethrillisgone?didAutoplayBounce=true>
 - "If I Had a Hammer" Peter, Paul, & Mary (Folk)
<http://www.rhapsody.com/peteseeger/ifihadahammersongsofhopeandstruggle>
 - "Oh Happy Day" Edwin Hawkins (Gospel)
<http://www.artistdirect.com/nad/window/media/player/0,,100005-89609-RMLO,00.html>
 - "Walking the Floor Over You" Ernest Tubb (Country)
<http://play.rhapsody.com/ernesttubb/retrospectivevol1/walkingtheflooroveryou>

- "Allons A Lafayette" Cleoma Breaux (Cajun)
http://www.artistdirect.com/nad/window/media/player/0,,50072-521333-WMLO_00.html
- Traditional Powwow" Renzel Last Horse (Native American)
<http://music.barnesandnoble.com/search/mediaplayer.asp?ean=660200207526&disc=4&track=14>

Background for teachers: See attached historical background for roots music.

Setting the stage: Display the musical instruments. Have roots music playing as students enter the room.

Lesson Procedure:

1. In order to divide the class into groups, pass out index cards with the following song titles written on the card. According to your number of students, divide the cards equally.

- "Row, Row, Row Your Boat"
- "Old McDonald Had a Farm"
- "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star"
- "Mary Had a Little Lamb"
- "The Alphabet Song"
- "Happy Birthday" song
- "Pop Goes the Weasel" etc.

After giving each student a card, ask them to hold the card to cover the song title. Then they should begin to HUM their assigned song and walk around the classroom to find the other students who are humming their same song. When each student finds others who are humming his/her same song, they should all stay in a group and keep humming (together this time) until all students have found their group.

2. Ask the students in each group to use drums (desk or book top, coffee cans, etc.), combs with wax paper (kazoo), spoons, flutes, tambourines, wooden sticks, etc. to tap out the beats to and sing their assigned group song. This activity may require going outside so the groups can practice before presenting. ☺
3. After each group's presentation, play samples of each of the types of roots music: Bluegrass, Gospel, Country, the Blues, folk music, Cajun/zydeco, and Native American. Discuss the various instruments that the students hear when they listen to the songs.
4. Assign one of each type of music to each group. Ask each group to change their song to fit the roots music style (using same words and similar tune, but changing the beat, etc). Perform.
5. Take the instrument quiz.

More resources:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_folk_music

<http://www.ibma.org/ibma.store/schools/index.asp> (bluegrass)

http://www.vhl.com/partners/vhl_music_studio/supplies/sayitloud/ep1-lesson01.html

Audio for roots music

From: PBS

http://www.pbs.org/americanrootsmusic/pbs_arm_its_historical_background.html

Historical Background

To appreciate the diversity of ideas and experiences that have shaped our history, we need to be sensitive to the complexities and varieties of cultural documentation, to the enormous possibilities these documents afford us to get at the interior of American lives, to get at peoples long excluded from the American experience, many of them losers in their own time, outlaws, rebels who - individually or collectively - tried to flesh out and give meaning to abstract notions of liberty, equality and freedom.

*-Leon Litwack, Ph.D.
Pulitzer Prize Winning Historian,
American Roots Music Adviser*

What is American roots music?

The term "American roots music" may not be a familiar one, and requires some explanation. At the beginning of the 20th Century, the term "folk music" was used by scholars to describe music made by whites of European ancestry, often in the relatively isolated rural South. As the century progressed, the definition of folk music expanded to include the song styles - particularly the blues - of Southern blacks as well. In general, folk music was viewed as a window into the cultural life of these groups. Folk songs communicated the hopes, sorrows and convictions of ordinary people's everyday lives. Increasingly, music made by other groups of Americans such as Native Americans, Mexican-Americans, and Cajuns came under the umbrella of "folk music." It was sung in churches, on front porches, in the fields and other workplaces, while rocking children to sleep, and at parties. The melodies and words were passed down from parent to child, though songs - and their meanings - often changed to reflect changing times.

In the 1960s, awareness of folk songs and musicians grew, and popular musicians began to draw on folk music as an artistic source as never before. "Folk music" then became a form of popular music itself, popularized by singer/songwriters such as Bob Dylan, who helped pioneer the intimate, often acoustic performing style that echoed that of community-based folk musicians. Music writers, scholars and fans began to look for new ways to describe the diverse array of musical styles still being sung and played in communities across America, though most often not heard on radios. The term "roots music" is now used to refer to this broad range of musical genres, which include blues, gospel, traditional country, zydeco, tejano, and native American pow-wow.

What can roots music teach us about cultural identity in the U.S.?

Songs are an important cultural form through which people assert and preserve their own histories in the face of changing social conditions. Spirituals sung by African-American slaves; protest songs sung by 1960s youth; Texas-Mexicans singing the *corrido*; and "union songs" sung by labor organizers all suggest how music has been both an intrinsic response to historical and cultural conflict and an expressive vehicle that encouraged collective action. As ethnomusicologist Manuel Pena notes, "the *corrido* functioned as a powerful symbolic response by the Texas-Mexicans to their oppression under the new system installed by the Anglos throughout the Southwest." Contemporary singer-songwriters from many different ethnic backgrounds continue to use music as a way to call attention to injustice. Roots music has long been a vehicle for offering the disenfranchised a voice.

American roots music draws on the lived experience of ordinary men and women, who were and often still are defined and limited by cultural constructions of race, class and gender. Just as music reflects how Americans have struggled against oppressive social and economic conditions, music is also a means of celebrating and giving dignity to identity.

Music performance was often a place whites and blacks could come together and transcend the social limits imposed by segregation. Historian Pete Daniel of the Smithsonian Institution points out that travelling black and white musicians often came into contact and influenced each others' musical repertoires and playing styles. However, particularly in the South, racial segregation continued to keep musicians and audiences apart according to an entrenched racial logic. With the advent of radio, a broad range of Americans were exposed to a diversity of musical styles, as there was no way to "segregate" the airwaves. Responses to racism and racial segregation were reflected in American roots music.

Among all of America's diverse peoples, there has long been reciprocal connections between religion, song, and the reproduction of "community." In the South, religious music of the 18th and 19th centuries influenced the separate but related development of African American and Anglo sacred music. All night "sings" were events that drew members of a community together to hear Spiritual music in the South; black male members of Gospel quartets formed bonds of

reciprocity that continued throughout their life cycles. As Bernice Johnson Reagon notes, "the quartet provided one more community-based structure where people could gather and create out of their own experience." Within black and white traditions, religious music often was a source for the shaping and performance of secular songs. As historian Bill Malone has pointed out, "Country music has been subject to no greater influence than Southern religious life, evolving in a society where religion was pervasive." Both black and white Southerners generally received their musical education in a milieu that stressed religious music. Songs such as "Amazing Grace" and "Farther Along" were common to both groups.

Particularly in the first half of the 20th century, poor rural whites were "objectified" by scholars and collectors as embodying a pure, authentic American culture linked to "Anglo," northern European sources. While African American folk song collections had been published as early as 1867, the notion of African Americans as authors of part of America's folk heritage did not gain widespread acceptance until later. Due, in part, to the efforts of John Lomax, blacks - particularly rural Bluesmen - came to be viewed as folk "heroes" and white folk scholars began in earnest to collect songs from African American communities as well as Anglo. For example, John Lomax was interested in the hypothetical conjunction between African American music and the origins of our national folk tradition, which he imagined was preserved among black convicts who had been isolated for many years from mainstream culture inside Southern prisons.

Unequal power relationships, shaped by differences in race and class and often gender, have characterized the development of "folk" music from its roots in local communities to its spread to wide and diverse audiences. Middle-class and elite, most often white, urban musicians, scholars and fans have been drawn to music made by relatively disenfranchised African Americans, whites and Latinos. This relationship has brought rural and "ethnic" music and the musicians themselves to the city, where they reached wide audiences, but were not always fairly compensated or credited by the promoters who helped popularize their music.

How is roots music related to historical events?

During the 20th century, the United States experienced monumental changes wrought by developments such as Industrialization, integration and globalization. As the American Roots Music series illustrates, roots music was linked to and reflected many dynamic movements for change, including the war on poverty, the New Deal, the labor movement, the Civil Rights movement and the peace, environmental, Native American, Chicano and women's movements.

Major historical events had significant impact on both the nature and the popularity of roots music in America. For example, the social and economic changes brought about by WWII had an enormous effect on Blues and white Country music. Before the war, both had been largely regional, developing different styles in different areas, and reaching mainly local audiences. Huge shifts of population combined with economic changes driven by technology and mass media made this music popular with broader audiences. The move from a rural to an urban environment exposed music to new and diverse influences. Musical styles, instrumentation and lyrics were modified accordingly. Similar dynamics followed historical transformations such as the Great Depression, the Dustbowl, westward expansion, the student movements of the 1960s and the globalization of America at the end of the century.

The 20th century witnessed an unparalleled development of technology that would have profound implications for every American. As people began to travel by railroads and automobiles and the economy became increasingly industrialized, regional boundaries were crossed and cultural interplay among America's diverse people enriched the nation's musical traditions. Musical cross-fertilization was also hastened by the development of communication technology such as the wax cylinder recorder, the phonograph, juke boxes, the motion picture camera and the radio, which spread regionally based music to broad audiences across the country.

Freedom has been a key theme in American roots music, both in terms of the ideas expressed by the music and the uses to which music is often put within social change movements. The history of American roots music is intricately woven with individual and collective struggles for social change and freedom from oppression, a dynamic powerfully illustrated by the history of the song "We Shall Overcome," which became an anthem in the Civil Rights movement. The theme of freedom is also embodied by many of America's musical heroes. One such romantic character is Woody Guthrie, celebrated as a wandering hero who eschewed the constraints of an increasingly industrializing society. Bluesmen and women, such as Muddy Waters and Bessie Smith, who transformed their harsh experiences into powerful musical expression, also embody the spirit of freedom and the refusal of constraint.

The continuing popularity of roots music throughout the course of the 20th and into the 21st centuries is testimony to its appeal and vitality as a set of musical genres that speak to - and of - the human condition, through very different historical periods. In this current era of globalization, roots music evolves by synthesizing elements from disparate sources. While the "roots" have been lifted from their geographic and cultural bases, roots music continues to give voice to an ever-increasing spectrum of Americans, who use music as a means of reflecting on and, in many cases still, promoting social change.

How is American roots music similar to American literature?

American vernacular music and literature have always drawn on each other as sources and reflect common historical and humanistic themes. Roots music echoes the concerns found in American literature

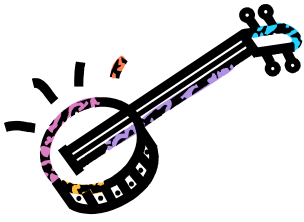
Historian Charles Wolfe writes,

One of the key narrative lines running through all four programs of ***American Roots Music*** is the perception of roots music as a powerful and unacknowledged folk literature. It is, in fact, a body of expressive culture that reflects and dramatizes the same kind of themes found in formal American literature: empowerment, freedom in a social structure, preserving traditions in a protean world, maintaining values, and finding strategies for seeking justice. We assume that roots music constitutes an important and neglected chapter in American culture, and that its themes and concerns often overlap with those of more formal culture. Instead of writing books and plays, the artists of roots music craft songs and ballads...hymns and protest songs. Their art has generally been oral, passed on by word of mouth, or by custom and imitation.

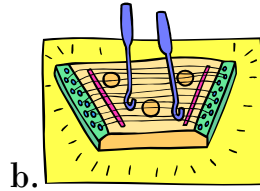
Developments in literature also shaped the way roots music was mediated and understood by a broad American audience. "Regionalism" and "naturalism," two literary movements of the late 19th century, aroused a popular interest in what could be called the "national picturesque": the Plantation South, the Wild West, and the Appalachian Frontier. These movements helped create an interest in rural America and the musical forms associated with it. "Muckraking" writers such as Upton Sinclair were influenced by the politics surrounding the labor movement and helped raise the level of social consciousness about the problems inherent in industrial society at a time when folk songs were depicting the lives of working-class Americans.

There are numerous points of thematic contact between American literature and vernacular music. For years, many of our most important writers have recognized links to our folk culture and have celebrated them. Charles Wolfe points out that Mark Twain described a "juba" dance in *Huckleberry Finn*; the poet Carl Sandburg was creating some of his greatest poems as he was compiling his 1925 *American Songbag*; Ralph Ellison used the Blues as a major element in his novels and stories; Woody Guthrie set out to write a song cycle that would be a people's version of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. Bruce Springsteen invokes John Steinbeck and Woody Guthrie in his record *The Ghost of Tom Joad*, which offers snapshots of contemporary disenfranchised Americans.

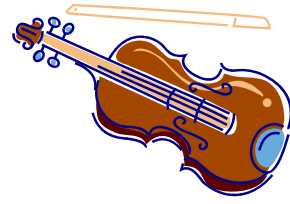
INSTRUMENTS of ROOTS MUSIC



a.



b.



c.



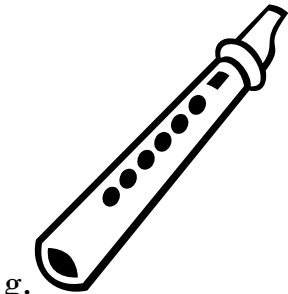
d.



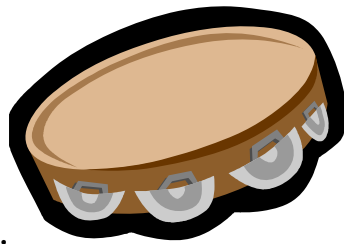
e.



f.



g.



h.



i.



j.

MATCHING: Your answers will be alphabetical letters from above.

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------|
| 1. tambourine | 1. _____ |
| 2. hammer dulcimer | 2. _____ |
| 3. fiddle | 3. _____ |
| 4. banjo | 4. _____ |
| 5. harmonica | 5. _____ |
| 6. spoons | 6. _____ |
| 7. guitar | 7. _____ |
| 8. accordion | 8. _____ |
| 9. flute | 9. _____ |
| 10. drum | 10. _____ |

Answers: 1. h 2. b 3. c 4. a 5. f
6. i 7. e 8. j 9. g 10. d