

Tell About the South: *The Story of Modern Southern Literature*
THE BLUES POETS

Lesson Plan created by Treasure Williams, Memphis

1. Overview

- After viewing *Tell About the South* and paying particular attention to the section on Blues poets, students will discuss the genesis of the Blues and the particular set of circumstances that led to its emergence. The following lesson focuses on the Blues and how modern Hip Hop is its direct descendant. At the lesson's culmination, students will create a Blues song, poem or rap.
- Grade Level (9-12)
- Time Allotment: Two 55 minute class meetings.*

2. Instructional Objective(s)

- Students will create a Blues song, poem or rap.
- **English II Writing Content Standard #1:** The student will develop the structural and creative skills necessary to produce written language that can be read and interpreted by various audiences.
- **English II Viewing and Representing Content Standard #3:** The student will use, read, and view media/technology and analyze content and concepts accurately.
- **English II Speaking and Listening Content Standard #4:** The student will express ideas clearly and effectively in a variety of oral contexts and apply active listening skills in the analysis and evaluation of spoken ideas.

3. Materials

- 1 copy of *Tell About the South*, video
- Discussion Questions: (1) *How might the Blues have served as poetry for the people?* (2) *What circumstances may have led to the creative outburst known as the Blues?* (3) *Why might the color blue have been chosen to describe the music created in Northern Mississippi?*
- Computer access to the following site:
<http://encarta.msn.com/encnet/refpages/search.aspx?q=blues+music>.
- A copy of the Hip Hop Album *Street's Disciple* by Nas
- A copy of *Martin Scorsese Presents the Blues: The Best of the Blues*

4. Instructional Procedures

- *Set (Introduction)*: The themes of love lost, friendship, and family are all present at some point in every human's life, and these themes (among others) are all prevalent in Blues music. In this lesson, you will use the "*The Story of Modern Southern Literature: Poets and Prophets*" video, the discussion questions, the World Wide Web, and your own "Blues experience" to create a Blues song, poem or rap born of your own life.
- **Instruction (Body)**
 - *Day 1 (55 minutes)*: Students will view "The Story of Modern Southern Literature: Poets and Prophets" video
 - *Day 2 (35 minutes)*: Students will finish viewing "The Story of Modern Southern Literature: Poets and Prophets" video. The remainder of the class should be spent answering the discussion questions.
 - *Day 3 (15 minutes)*: The teacher should refresh students' memories regarding "*The Story of Modern Southern Literature: Poets and Prophets*" video. Passing out graded discussion questions would be a good way to do this. *Day 3 (10 minutes)*: Next, the teacher should play "Bridging the Gap" by Nas and "I'm your Hoochie Coochie Man" by Muddy Waters, explaining that along with the discussion questions, the students' original songs, poems or raps are how students will be assessed during this min-unit. *Day 3 (10 minutes)*: The teacher should then distribute laptops, or sit students at pc's. Then the teacher should take students to <http://encarta.msn.com/encnet/refpages/search.aspx?q=blues+music>, advising them to add the site to their "Favorites" list. *Day 3 (remaining 20 minutes)*: Student will begin to word process their songs, poems or raps. The teacher will monitor progress and make sure the work is saved.
 - *Day 4 (10 minutes)*: The teacher will redistribute the laptops or resear students at PCs. The teacher will make certain that each student has a saved work in progress and that each student understands that they must finish their work by the end of the class period. *Day 4 (30 minutes)*: Students should use this time to complete their song, poem or rap. *Day 4 (remaining 15 minutes)*: the teacher should be prepared

to give some tips on oral presentation (maintaining eye contact, enunciation, vocal volume, etc).

- *Day 5 (55 minutes)*: Students should give presentations
- **Closure (Conclusion)**
 - If there is enough time, groups should be required to provide verbal feedback/critique at the end of each presentation. The song poems could be printed and mounted on cardboard to create a standing exhibit for other classes to view.

5. Supplemental Activities

- *Plans and/or websites for “further study”*: In addition to the website included in this lesson, students may want to go to the Academy of American Poets site, <http://www.poets.org> and read about “Blues poetry”.
- *Independent practice*: Students may want to pick one seminal Blues artist, such as Robert Johnson and use legal audio sites to burn a personal mixed CD .
- *Independent review*: Using the public library, students may want to check out the collected Blues research of Alan Lomax.
- *Re-teaching, and/or enrichment*: Students may want to create a display that traces the genesis of the Blues, beginning in Africa and ending with modern Hip Hop.

* Since “*The Story of Modern Southern Literature: Poets and Prophets*” video is 90 minutes long, this lesson can provide the “product demonstration” in a week long mini-unit on southern writers.