

John Lee Hooker

Learning Outcomes

- Understand the musical and cultural importance of the blues
- Educate students in ways that encourage and enrich their musical appreciation and expression
- Create an enhanced exploratory experience
- Demonstrate the correlation between the railroads and the blues

Standards

Mississippi Visual and Performing Arts (Music)

Students should understand the roles and functions of music and musicians in cultures, times, traditions, and places. Content Strand: History/Culture (HC)

Students will perceive, understand, and appreciate the diverse meanings and value of music.

Content Strand: Aesthetics (A)

Social Studies

Students will use social studies tools to describe the connections among people, places, and environment of Mississippi and the southeastern region. (Global affairs)

Students will examine cultural artifacts (including but not limited to visual art, literature, music, theatre, sports) to contextualize historical developments. (Culture)

College and Career-Readiness Anchor Standards: Reading and Writing

Elementary

Reading

Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

Writing

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

Secondary

Reading

Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

Writing

Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

“King of the Boogie”

Known to music fans around the world as the “King of the Boogie,” John Lee Hooker endures as one of the true superstars of the blues genre: the ultimate beholder of cool. His work is widely recognized for its impact on modern music – his simple, yet deeply effective songs transcend borders and languages around the globe. Each decade of Hooker’s long career brought a new generation of fans and fresh opportunities for the ever-evolving artist. He never slowed down either: As John Lee Hooker entered his 70s, he suddenly found himself in the most successful era of his career – reinvented yet again, and energized as ever, touring and recording up until his passing in 2001.

Born near Clarksdale, Mississippi on August 22, 1917 to a sharecropping family, John Lee Hooker’s primary musical influence came from his stepfather, Will Moore— a blues musician who taught his young stepson to play the guitar, and whom John Lee later credited for his unique style on the instrument. He was also influenced by his sister’s boyfriend, Tony Hollins— a blues musician who gave Hooker his first guitar.

By the late 1930s, Hooker had moved north to Detroit by way of Memphis and Cincinnati. By day, he was a janitor in the auto factories, but by night, like many other transplants from the rural Delta, he entertained friends and neighbors by playing at house parties. “The Hook” gained fans around town from these shows, including local record store owner Elmer Barbee. Barbee was so impressed by the young musician that he introduced him to Bernard Besman—a producer, record distributor and owner of Sensation Records. By 1948, Hooker now honing his style on an electric guitar—had recorded several songs for Besman, who, in turn, leased the tracks to Modern Records. Among these first recordings was “Boogie Chillen,” (soon after appearing as “Boogie Chillun”) which became a number one jukebox hit, selling over a million copies. This success was soon followed by a string of hits, including “I’m in the Mood,” “Crawling Kingsnake” and “Hobo Blues.” Over the next 15 years, John Lee signed to a new label, Vee-Jay Records, and maintained a prolific recording schedule, releasing over 100 songs on the imprint.

When the young bohemian artists of the 1960s “discovered” Hooker, among other notable blues originators, he found his career taking on a new direction. With the folk movement in high gear, Hooker returned to his solo, acoustic roots, and was in strong demand to perform at colleges and folk festivals around the country. Across the Atlantic, emerging British bands were idolizing Hooker’s work. Artists like the Rolling Stones, the Animals and the Yardbirds introduced Hooker’s sound to new and eager audiences, whose admiration and influence helped build Hooker up to superstar status. By 1970, Hooker had relocated to California and was busy collaborating on several projects with rock acts. One such collaboration was with Canned Heat, which resulted in 1971’s hit record *Hooker ‘n’ Heat*. The double LP became John Lee Hooker’s first charting album.

Throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, John Lee toured the U.S. and Europe steadily. His appearance in the legendary Blues Brothers movie resulted in a heightened profile once again. Then, at the age of 72, John Lee Hooker released the biggest album of his career, *The Healer*. The GRAMMY® Award-winning 1989 album paired contemporary artists (Bonnie Raitt, Carlos Santana, Los Lobos and George Thorogood, among others) with Hooker on some of his most famous tracks. *The Healer* was released to critical acclaim and sold over one million copies. The Hook rounded out the decade as a guest performer with the Rolling Stones, during the national broadcast of their 1989 Steel Wheels tour.

With his recent successes, John Lee entered the 1990s with a sense of renewed inspiration. Not only was the decade a time of celebration and recognition for the legendary artist, but it was also a highly productive era. He released five studio albums over the next few years, including *Mr. Lucky*, which once again teamed up Hooker with an array of artists; *Boom Boom*, which aimed to introduce new fans to his classic material; the GRAMMY® Award-winning *Chill Out*; a collaboration with Van Morrison entitled *Don't Look Back*, which also garnered two awards at the 1997 GRAMMYS®; and *The Best of Friends*, which highlights collaborations with an array of artists throughout Hooker's career. Throughout the decade, Hooker's great body of work and contributions to modern music were being recognized not only by his peers, but also by a younger generation. He became a familiar face in popular culture, with appearances on *The Tonight Show* and *Late Night with David Letterman*. In 1990, a massive tribute concert took place at New York's Madison Square Garden, featuring Hooker and an all-star lineup of guest artists. One year later, John Lee was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, while in 1997; he was presented with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. In 2000, shortly before his death in 2001, John Lee Hooker was recognized with a GRAMMY® Lifetime Achievement Award, and just one week before his passing, ever true to form, the bluesman spent his final Saturday night playing a now-legendary show to a packed house at the Luther Burbank Center for the Arts in Santa Rosa, CA.

The Hook continues to live on: His music can regularly be heard in TV shows, commercials and films, and many of his tracks have also found a second life sampled in new songs – by the likes of R&B star Brandi, hip-hop legend Chuck D and French electronic musician St. Germain, among many others. Most recently, his iconic recording, the 1962 Vee-Jay Records single “Boom Boom,” was inducted into the 2016 GRAMMY® Hall of Fame. (2016, John Lee Hooker Estate)

The Blues

Blues is a musical form which was first developed by African Americans in the rural South over many decades in the 1800s. One aspect of American music which was introduced by the blues was an aspect of realism. Blues typically addresses everyday life and celebrates its ups and downs.

How did blues move from the Mississippi Delta and other rural locations to a position of worldwide prominence? In the early years of the 20th Century, professional bands began to incorporate blues into their shows. W.C. Handy, often referred to as “Father of the Blues,” published his first blues in sheet music in 1912. Handy's affinity for blues developed out of his experiences, and in Clarksdale, Mississippi, he made a conscious decision to place blues front and center during his career. *Crossroads of the Heart: Creativity and Tradition in Mississippi; Music*. Mississippi Arts Commission.

The blues can be difficult to define for several reasons, as the Mississippi Arts Commission has noted as follows: The blues can be discussed as: (1) a feeling or emotion, and (2) a musical form. People often play the blues (the musical form) in order to get rid of the blues (the feeling). The use of the word “blues” to refer to a sad or melancholy emotion apparently stems from the term “blue devil,” which first appeared in the English language in the 1700s. It later became common to speak of “having the blues” to refer to a feeling of sadness.

Bluesman John Lee Hooker, from Tallahatchie County, Mississippi, explained that, “The blues was here when the world got here. When Adam and Eve come from the garden. The blues was in them since they got together, man and woman.” Today, blues can be heard around the world, in forms which range from the earliest folk blues to more modern electric styles. Also, the influence of blues on jazz, country music, and rock-and roll demonstrates that the folk music of rural African Americans in the South has become a central aspect of American and world musical culture.

Railroads

The train revolutionized travel. The train played a very important role in the history of the blues because of both its symbolism—a rapid means of leaving or escaping—and because it was the development of the train system in the state, and that system’s connection to other cities, which allowed the Delta area to develop economically. These trains were often initially used to help remove lumber during the long process of clearing the Delta of forests and swamp. One of the most well-known of these was the “Peavine” railroad which connected Dockery Farms plantation, the home of a number of influential blues artists, to the nearby city of Cleveland and the Illinois Central railway line. (*The Mississippi Blues Trail and Beyond*, Transportation, 4, p. 2)

Martin and Sue King Railroad Heritage Museum

This museum’s primary mission is to preserve and promote the history of the railroad and its impact on Cleveland and the Delta region. The model train layout is built to ¼” scale. The layout is 71’ x 17’ and the model trains run through the highly detailed towns and scenery.

Home to one of the largest O gauge model train layouts in the entire Southeast, the inside of the museum is also full of railroad tools, photos, and related artifacts. Outside, a 1941 Illinois Central caboose in near original condition, is open for touring. Come take a walk through history with us--the railroad changed everything and we show you how.

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Awards

GRAMMY Awards®

1997	Best Pop Collaboration With Vocals	Don't Look Back	John Lee Hooker & Van Morrison, artists.
1997	Best Traditional Blues Album	Don't Look Back	John Lee Hooker, artist.
1995	Best Traditional Blues Album	Chill Out	John Lee Hooker, artist.
1989	Best Traditional Blues Recording	I'm In The Mood	Bonnie Raitt & John Lee Hooker, artists.

Blues Hall of Fame Awards

	Award Type	Award Category	Award Year	Placement
John Lee Hooker	Blues Music Awards	Traditional Blues Male Artist	1993 - 14th Annual Blues Awards	Winner
John Lee Hooker	Blues Music Awards	Traditional Blues Male Artist	1988 - 9th Annual Blues Music Awards	Winner
John Lee Hooker	Blues Music Awards	Traditional Blues Male Artist	1986 - 7th Annual Blues Awards	Winner
John Lee Hooker	Blues Music Awards	Traditional Blues Male Artist	1987 - 8th Annual Blues Awards	Winner
John Lee Hooker	Blues Music Awards	Traditional Blues Male Artist	1984 - 5th Annual Blues Awards	Winner
John Lee Hooker	Blues Music Awards	Traditional Blues Male Artist	1985 - 6th Annual Blues Awards	Winner
John Lee Hooker	Blues Music Awards	Traditional Blues Male Artist	1989 - 10th Annual Blues Awards	Winner
John Lee Hooker: Chill Out	Blues Music Awards	Traditional Blues Album	1996 - 17th W.C. Handy Blues Awards	Winner
Jealous–John Lee Hooker (Pausa)	Blues Music Awards	Traditional Blues Album	1986 - 7th Annual Blues Awards	Winner
Shout! Factory – Hooker – John Lee Hooker	Blues Music Awards	Historical Album	2007 - 28th Blues Music Awards	Winner
John Lee Hooker	Blues Music Awards	Contemporary Blues Male Artist	1990 - 11th Annual Blues Awards	Winner
The Healer–John Lee Hooker	Blues Music Awards	Contemporary Blues Album	1990 - 11th Annual Blues Awards	Winner
John Lee Hooker	Blues Music Awards	Blues Vocalist	1990 - 11th Annual Blues Awards	Winner
Real Folk Blues–John Lee Hooker (Chess, 1966)	Blues Hall of Fame	Classic of Blues Recording-Album	2017 – Blues Hall of Fame Inductees	

Activities

Elementary

While listening to blues music by John Lee Hooker, have students draw a picture of a scene surrounding the RR after being read *The Freight Train* book by Donald Crews. This activity could take place in the classroom or during a visit to the Martin and Sue King Railroad Museum and the John Lee Hooker exhibit at GRAMMY Museum® Mississippi.

Print an activity sheet for children to label the basic parts of the guitar. There are many online freebies, with different levels of difficulty. The following is one example that includes the labeled parts, definitions of parts, and a fill-in-the-blank option.

http://www.magnoliaguitar.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Guitar_Parts_Diagram_MagnoliaGuitar2011cc.pdf

Have the children make a cereal box guitar and use basic terminology of a guitar.

www.myteachingstation.com; Search “Cereal Box Guitar.” Adaptations may be made to add more individual art or creative skills.

Secondary

Discussion questions:

What do you know about the Blues?

What Mississippi performers do you associate with the Blues?

What instruments are featured?

What common themes are present in the songs?

Blues songs typically contain a description of a feeling rather than a story. Lyrics do not have to be in a certain order and often just repeat stanzas. Artists believed that singing the blues would help the blues go away. Play the video of John Lee Hooker’s performance in *The Blues Brothers* movie from 1980. Note that the song is also the theme song from the current TV series NCIS New Orleans. What were his feelings in this song? What were the repetitions? Allow students to listen to other blues songs by John Lee Hooker. Ask them to name some feelings that make them “blue”.

Have the students divide into groups of 4 or 5 to compose a short “blues” song. Have students create lyrics/music based on “blues feelings” and the blues musical form AAB. Ask for volunteer groups to share their songs. The following link can be used to further explain AAB form, also known as the 12 Bar Blues Song Form.

<http://www.songstuff.com/song-writing/article/aab-song-form/>

Have students explore the Mississippi Blues Trail website (Mississippi blues trail.org). Divide the students in groups of 3. Select one of the Regions from the map. Explore the blues musicians from that region and select 2 musicians. Research each and provide a summary of their contributions to music.

While visiting the Grammy Museum each student will select 2 favorite pieces/artifacts//performances, research what year they are from and further information about the artist.

Videos

Boogie Chillen original 1948 version https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDBz4ASw6uU	2:42
Sally Mae https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=18SysMaVLTU	3:12
Crawlin' King Snake https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5keTQ5DU2U	5:19
Frisco Blues https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3Bttef8JM4	2:41
I Cover the Waterfront https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3YS8Z_pz2Cg	5:25
One Bourbon, One Scotch, One Beer https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3o8-bcfFvE	3:01
Boom Boom (from "The Blues Brothers") https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nUUyFrHERpU	2:59
Dimples https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OC_IZIOJv94	2:12
I'm in the Mood https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PADfOighk4k	3:00
Messin with the Hook (Album: Hooker 'N Heat) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vMJBEXJis0w&list=PLTRk2M4WaCsQsYAf87qOWBc9uAY4Da3ll	3:25

References/Resources

The Blues

<http://www.pbs.org/theblues/index.html>

The Blues Foundation

<https://blues.org/>

Delta State University Delta Center for Culture and Learning

<http://deltacenterforcultureandlearning.com/>

Evans, David, "Blues," in Wilson & Ferris, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989; pp. 995-998.

Grammy Museum

<http://www.grammymuseum.org/>

John Lee Hooker Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/JohnLeeHookerofficial>

John Lee Hooker Website

<http://www.johnleehooker.com/history/biography>

2016 John Lee Hooker Estate.

Leander C. Jones, "W.C. Handy," in Wilson & Ferris, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989; p. 1061.

Mississippi Arts Commission

<https://arts.ms.gov/>

Crossroads of the Heart: Creativity and Tradition in Mississippi: Music.
The Mississippi Blues Trail and Beyond

Mississippi Blues Trail Site

<http://msbluestrail.org/>

Rock and Roll and an American Story

<http://teachrock.org/>