Lesson: Understanding Mississippi History through Music and the Effects of Music on Society

The purpose of this plan is to help teachers bring to their students the educational power of music and to:
• appreciate some of the key themes/issues characterizing American life from the 1950s to today,
• explore the idea of music as a factor in shaping as well as reflecting cultural beliefs and practices, and
• show how cultural beliefs and practices have changed since the 1950s.

Lesson Goals

- Educate youth in ways that encourage and enrich their musical appreciation and expression
- Create an enhanced exploratory experience for students
- Foster pride in Mississippi's musical achievements nationally and internationally

Student Learning Outcomes

- Gain an appreciation of the musical accomplishments of artists from Mississippi and specifically from the Mississippi Delta
- Have a better understanding of popular culture as a tool for social change

Mississippi Visual and Performing Arts (Music)
Goal 3: Students should understand the roles and functions of music and musicians in cultures, times, traditions, and places. Content Strand: History/Culture (HC)

Benchmark: Analyze forms and subject matter in music that recur across cultures, times, and places

Goal 4: Students will perceive, understand, and appreciate the diverse meanings and value of music. Content Strand: Aesthetics (A)

Benchmark: Interpret the value of a musical work in terms of aesthetic qualities

Vocabulary
Blues
Country
Genre
Legend
Mississippi Delta
Rock and Roll
Soul

Materials and Equipment
Markers
Smart board
Whiteboards
Band of Legends Bios
Mississippi Hall of Fame Inductee List
Timeline

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by Dr. Peggy Campbell and Dr. Linda Coleman, Cleveland, MS, 2015

Introduction
Music has been referred to as the universal language of mankind (Henry Wadsworth Longfellow) and Mississippi is proof of that statement.

> Mississippi has a rich and unique musical heritage. The roots of this history go back before the Civil War, and music has provided an outlet for creative expression. . . . Mississippi is the birthplace of the Blues and America's music, and her musicians are known the world over. No other state has produced such a high percentage of internationally known, world-class artists. (Mississippi Musicians Hall of Fame).

This lesson looks at and listens to the decades of the 50s and 60s and the social, cultural, and political events. Music began to reflect the context of these decades and changed the world in ways it had not known before.

A Band of Legends
A Band of Legends is an eclectic group of supremely versatile musicians who created the music behind some of the world's greatest recordings and with most of the major recording acts. Their careers span more than five decades and within that time they composed, recorded, and produced music that has defined those decades (see Bios).

It is suggested that the teacher provides an overview of the band's bios and connects with examples of timeline events.

Instructional Sequence

ELVIS PRESLEY
(1935 – 1977)

An American singer and actor, Elvis Presley is regarded as one of the most significant icons of the 20th century. He is often referred to as "The King of Rock and Roll" or simply "The King."

Presley was born in Tupelo, MS, and when he was 13 years old, he and his family relocated to Memphis, Tennessee. His music career began there in 1954,
when he recorded a song with producer Sam Phillips at Sun Records. Presley was an early popularizer of rockabilly, upbeat fusion of country music and rhythm and blues. He was regarded as the leading figure of rock and roll after a series of successful television appearances and chart-topping records. His energized interpretations of songs coincided with the dawn of the Civil Rights Movement and made him enormously popular.

In 1956, he made his first movie, *Love Me Tender*. He was drafted into the military in 1958. The 1960's were devoted to making movies and their accompanying sound-track albums. In the late 1960's he returned to a string of successful concert tours. Several years of prescription drug abuse severely damaged his health and he died in 1977 at the age of 42.

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Presley is one of the most celebrated and influential musicians of the 20th century. Commercially successful in many genres, including pop, blues and gospel, he is the bestselling solo artist in the history of recorded music. He won three Grammys, also receiving the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award at the age of 36, and was inducted into multiple music halls of fame.

Activities

Ask students "Where is the Mississippi Delta?" On Smart Board pull up website Mississippi Delta (Wikipedia). Explain to students the geographic description, definition and other facts.

The Delta is shown along with geographic description, definition and other facts. Another description by David Chon, a Delta native, is a much used quote "begins in the lobby of the Peabody Hotel in Memphis and ends on Catfish Row in Vicksburg."

<u>Mississippi Museum Hall of Fame</u>

Mississippi Musicians Hall of Fame, headquartered in Clinton, Mississippi, honors Mississippi's famous musicians. It is a "Who's Who" of the blues, rock and roll, and jazz from their beginnings to present day.

Provide Handout to students. Have student star blues musicians from the Delta.

Students may know a little about the blues, which was born in the Delta. If not, tell them. A blues song could be played at this time.

Ask the question, "Did you know that blues music was invented by African-Americans who lived mostly in the Delta of Mississippi?"

Share the following:

After the Civil War, most African-Americans continued to work on farms and plantations. While working in the fields they would have chants or would "holler" in rhythm with the work of "choppin" cotton (cutting down weeds). The blues music told stories of the hard times at work. The blues depicted a sad frame of mind. When we say we have the blues, we mean we are feeling sad. Blues music was born in the Delta in Mississippi; this unique form of music has helped make Mississippi unique. Blues music provided the foundation for future music genres. People from all over the world love blues music and come to see where it all began.

During the 1930s, 40s and 50s, many southern African-Americans left the south and went north. Many from Mississippi, including blues singers, moved to major cities such as Memphis, Detroit, Chicago and Buffalo. This is called the "great migration." This led to a merging of African-American music with traditionally white music.

Why do you think African-Americans left and moved north? Let students answer.
They felt they would have better economic opportunities.

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Rock and Roll
Rock and roll arose in the Southern United States where most of the major rock and roll acts got their start.

Show video of Elvis Presley from YouTube. Select one that would appeal to the students. Share information from the short biography provided.
Music is often a reflection of the culture during a period of time. What events occurred during the 1950s and early 60s? Provide timeline to students. Point out several items under each column to reflect the culture and the music.

Review of Lesson(s)
Let's review some things we have learned.

1. The blues was born in the Mississippi Delta where African-Americans worked in the fields on plantations.
2. Most, if not all, of America's popular music came from the blues.
3. Music helped form Mississippi's unique identity.
4. Mississippi musicians traveled to Detroit and Chicago to form a strong connection between those cities and Mississippi. This was during the great migration that took place in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s.
5. African-American and white musicians learned from each other to form new styles of music.

Assessment
It is not intended that there be a lot of formal assessment for this lesson, but the following could be reviewed as informal assessment:

- In small groups consider and discuss how the political, social, and economic conditions affect the musical scene.
- How have the people living in a certain place influenced the genre(s) and/or particular songs developed?
- Have each group report out. List responses on the board.
- Play a song from a Mississippi Delta musician . Create a visual of the image you get of the Mississippi Delta from this song. Share visuals in small groups.

Resources
A Band of Legends
www.facebook.com/abandoflegends

Delta State University Delta Center for Culture and Learning
http://deltacenterforcultureandlearning.com/

Grammy Museum at L.A.
www.Grammymuseum.org
Mississippi Blues Trail
http://msbluestrail.org/

Mississippi Delta (Wikipedia)

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Mississippi Writers and Musicians
www.mississippiwritersandmusicians.com/

Mississippi Museum Hall of Fame
www.msmusic.org

Rock and Roll (Wikipedia)
Stax Museum
http://staxmuseum.com/museum/resources/

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