

The Blues, an Introduction

CMP Lessons for 5th Grade General Music Students

By Bruce Clawson

Knowledge Outcome

The students will understand and compose compositions using the 12-bar blues pattern.

Skill Outcome

The students will perform the Blues Scale based on a pentatonic scale with additional blue notes.

Affective Outcome

The students will explore the interaction between a basic blues chord progression and pitches of the blues scale to define relationships that are consonant or dissonant, and use these relationships to convey the emotional quality of a blues lyric.

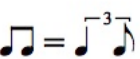
Heart Statement

The heart of the 12-bar blues form comes from the interplay of elements that create tension and release. These elements include static v. quickly changing harmony, use of dominant 7th chords, and simultaneous major/minor tonality. While these elements are not unique to the blues the way they are combined with a typical blues lyric, often expressing great pain within a racial social context or describing personal loss, has given rise to an enduring legacy.

Analysis

Rhythm

While not the primary focus of these lessons, another common style trait is the use of swing, or shuffle, rhythm patterns, commonly denoted in tempo markings as:

Swing! 

Form

The history of the blues is one of expressing the gamut of human emotions under adverse conditions, which are generally expressed using a simple, but powerful verse structure when creating lyrics to the songs. The structure, in its simplest form (AAB), is as follows:

Statement/Question

Statement/Question

Answer

A second part of the form of the blues include chord changes within a 12-measure form, specifically the move from the I chord to the IV chord in measure 5, and the rapid change from the V to IV to I in the last 4 measures, also known as the turnaround.

Harmony

Chordal harmony is limited to tonic, sub-dominant and dominant chords for the purposes of these lessons. These chords usually contain an added flat 7th, as well; in this case the flat 7th is added as a lower neighbor note to each of the roots played on the xylophone. When creating blues-style melodies and harmonies, it is typical to add altered tones to the pentatonic scale, especially the flatted fifth and flatted 7th, whose use implies harmonies that are simultaneously major and minor.

Texture

The texture of the song in our lesson will be thin, including recorder alone, recorder and bass xylophone, and voice.

Melody

The blues melodies for these lessons are yet to be created. As in the harmony section, melodies are usually, but not always, based on a pentatonic scale modified with altered tones, especially the flat 5th and flat 7th.

Expression

The range of emotions that can be conveyed in the blues form is as varied as life itself. Traditionally, typical blues lyrics express the pain of life, trouble with a lover, or loss of something dear to the singer.

Music Selection

Much of the music that we learn about and perform in class comes from the folk tradition of America. As a musical form the Blues ranks high in this tradition in terms of variety, musical expression, social relevance, historical importance, and entertainment value. It is such a large topic that a person could easily spend their entire musical life listening to, learning about, and performing the Blues, and this lesson will focus on some of its basics elements. These elements, whose uses generate tremendous possibilities for expressing the tension and release of emotions in daily life, are some of the building blocks on which an incredibly diverse and powerful genre of music has developed. The Blues is one of America's finest contributions to world music culture.

Assessment

Knowledge Outcome Assessment

Once the pattern of the roots for a 12-bar blues has been learned, the students play the pattern for the class in their squads.

Skill Outcome Assessment

Students play the E pentatonic blues scale in squads for the class.

Affective Outcome Assessment

Student will create a blues lyric based on a life experience, and then a melody based on that lyric, consciously using consonant or dissonant pitches to express the level of emotional tension in the lyric.

Knowledge Outcome (*The students will understand and compose compositions using the 12-bar blues pattern.*)

1. Bug Story
2. *Everyday I Have the Blues*
When you see me worryin' baby, it's you I hate to lose
4. **“What do you know about the blues?”**
5. Warm up with patterns of D, F, and S
6. Listen for # of measures in the pattern found in the song *Green Onions*.
7. Sing solfege for D, hum the unknown measures.
8. **“Test which notes, F or S, fit in measures 5, 6, 10 and 11.”**
9. Sing the entire pattern in solfege.
10. Play the pattern on xylophones using straight quarter notes for each measure.
11. Introduce the swing rhythm pattern (1 a 2 a 3 4). Pat the pattern on the right leg, but pat beat 3 on the left leg.
12. Transfer the pattern to xylophones, playing the 7th (the bar to the left of Do, Fa, or Sol, respectively) on beat 3.
13. **“Where do you hear the tension rise and fall in within the pattern?”**
14. Squads play the pattern on the xylophones one at a time (knowledge assessment).

Skill Outcome (*The students will perform the Blues Scale based on a pentatonic scale with additional blue notes.*)

1. Warm up with E pentatonic reading patterns that do not include Bb.
2. Using a pitch ladder, the class plays an E pentatonic scale on the recorder.
3. A new pitch ladder is presented with a blank space between A and B. The teacher plays the new note (Bb) when the blank space is reached.
4. Introduce the fingering and notation for Bb. The class plays the new scale, the E Blues Scale.
5. **“If E is the first note of the scale, which note did we change to make the blue note?” (E = 1, ? = 5)**

6. The class echoes 2-measure patterns played by the teacher using the blues scale while accompanied by xylophones playing the 12 bar blues pattern.
7. Squads play the E pentatonic blues scale for the other members of the class (skill assessment).

Affective Outcome (*The students will explore the interaction of a basic blues chord progression with the blues scale to create moments of tension and release*)

1. *Clashing and Complimentary*: introduce the vocabulary words *consonant* and *dissonant*.
2. *Clashing and Complimentary*: colors surrounding a color alter the eye's perception of it.
3. Warm up with the blues scale played on recorder.
4. *Consonant or Dissonant* worksheet.
5. **"Do you hear any patterns in the way the next 2 sets of lyrics are put together? *Everyday I Have the Blues, How Blue Can You Get?***
6. Statement/Question Ask something
Statement/Question ask again (tension builds)
Answer – receive an answer and the tension releases
7. Outside of class, the students create a blues lyric based on an emotional (does not have to be tragic) event in their own life.
 - Experiment with various ways of singing it, and playing it on the recorder.
 - Notate the pitches of their blues melody by writing a pitch name over each syllable from of their lyric.
 - Choose pitches consonant and or dissonant to express the emotion of their lyric.
 - Use the rhythm of the words for the melody, there is no need to notate it, but you should be able to clap it.
 - Turn in their completed worksheet (affective assessment).
8. Play your composition with the blues harmonic pattern on the xylophones.

Appendices

Vocal/Chord Root Warm up:

Warm up by singing solfege patterns with D, S, and F (I, IV, V roots).

D D D D R R R R M M M M F F F F S S S S D

7

D D F F S S D

11

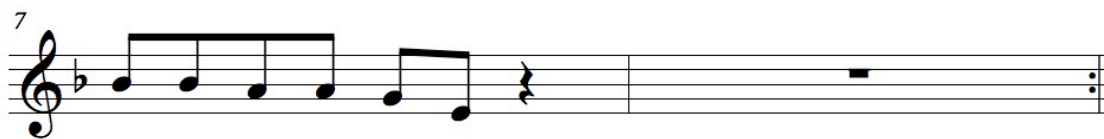
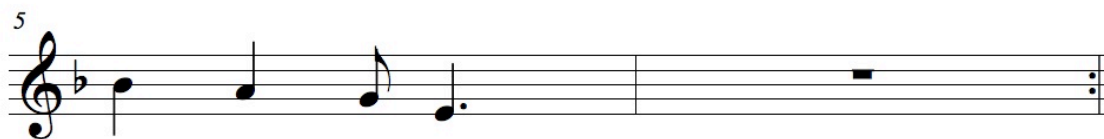
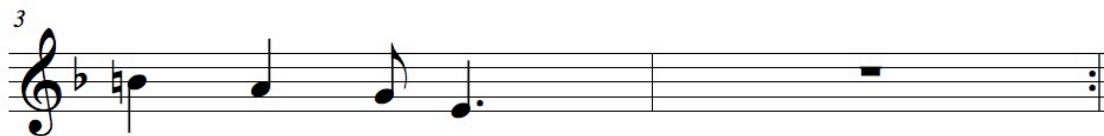
D D F F D D S D

15

D D F D S F D

Blues Patterns for Recorder

Repeat each pattern 3 times, echoing the teacher.



Create a Blues Melody from a Blues Lyric

Name _____ 5N 5W

Create a blues **lyric** following the model below. Tell about a real-life situation. It doesn't have to be sad, and you won't have to share your lyric with anyone except me unless you want to. Also, pay attention to the last word in each line and make sure they are repeated or rhyme.

Next, create a blues **melody** based on your lyric. You'll need to somehow combine the notes of the blues scale with the rhythm of the words from your lyric. Use the *Consonant or Dissonant* chart we made in class to help you decide which pitches to use. Try lots of different notes. Which ones help tell the story of your lyric the best? Write the pitch name you want to use above the lyric. Once you are done, try playing it!

The Model:

Say something,

Say it again with, or without, a little variation (same last word)

Say something else (rhyming last word)

Examples:

Every day, every day I have the blues.

Every day, every day I have the blues. (no variation)

The way you keep me worried woman, you know it's you I hate to lose.

I been downhearted ever since the day we met.

You know I been downhearted baby, ever since the day we met.

You know our love is nothing but the blues, baby how blue can you get?

By the end of this exercise you should have:

- written a lyric in the blues format
- chosen a pitch for each word of the lyric
- written that pitch above each word of the lyric being aware of how consonant and dissonant notes help tell the story of your lyric.
- played the rhythm of the lyric on your recorder using the pitches you wrote.

Lyric Writing Assessment Tool

June 22, 2010

	□ □ □	□ □ □ □ □ □	□ □
	Ev'-ry day	ev'-ry day	I have the blues
4	<i>D</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>D</i>
4	<i>D</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>D</i>
	□ □ □	□ □ □ □ □ □	□ □
	Ev'-ry day	ev'-ry day	I have the blues
	<i>F</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>D</i>
	<i>F</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>D</i>
	□ □ □ □ □ □	□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □	
	When you see me	worry-in' ba-by,	it's you I hate to lose
	<i>S</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>D</i>
	<i>S</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>D</i>

	□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □		
4	<i>D</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>D</i>
4	<i>D</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>D</i>
	□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □		
	<i>F</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>D</i>
	<i>F</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>D</i>
	□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □		
	<i>S</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>D</i>
	<i>S</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>D</i>

Grading Rubric: Creating a Blues Lyric and Melody

Name _____

5N 5W

1. Lyric is about a real situation in your life. (5 points) _____

2. The first two lines end with the same word. (2 points) _____

3. The third line ends with a word that rhymes
with the last word of the first two lines. (3 points) _____

4. The lyrics follow the Same Same Different form. (5 points) _____

5. Your work is legible and of high quality. (5 points) _____

6. You have assigned a pitch from the blues scale to each
the syllables in your lyric. (5 points) _____

8. When you play your melody, you use the rhythm of the
words. (5 points) _____

9. In the space below, or on the back of this page, tell me how your
choice of pitches helped to tell the story or your lyric. (10 points)

Consonant or Dissonant?

How do different pitches of the blues scale sound against the 3 main chords in the blues harmony pattern? Write the pitch name from the blues scale on the side that describes it best. If it sounds smooth, or it fits really well, then it is *consonant*, if it sounds like it clashes with the chord, then it is *dissonant*.

The I Chord (E7)

Consonant

Dissonant

The IV Chord (A7)

Consonant

Dissonant

The V Chord (B7)

Consonant

Dissonant

Use Roman Numerals to Indicate the Chord Progression in the 12-bar Blues Pattern.

Name _____ 5N 5W

Rewrite the 12 - Bar Blues Chord Progression using Roman Numerals in place of the solfege (Do = I, Fa = IV, Sol = V)

4									
4									

Examples of 4th Grade Consonant and Dissonant Choices

June 13, 2010

The I Chord (E⁷)
E B D

E B G D' A Bb

Consonant Fits Compliments Dissonant Clashes

Jun 8-7:46 AM

The IV Chord (A⁷)
A E G

E A B G D' Bb

Consonant Fits Compliments Dissonant Clashes

Jun 8-7:46 AM

The V Chord (B⁷)
B F# A

G B E Bb A D'

Consonant Fits Compliments Dissonant Clashes

Jun 8-7:46 AM

The I Chord (E⁷)
E B D

E A G B Bb D'

Consonant Fits Compliments Dissonant Clashes

Jun 8-7:46 AM

The IV Chord (A⁷)
A E G

E G A Bb B D'

Consonant Fits Compliments Dissonant Clashes

Jun 8-7:46 AM

The V Chord (B⁷)
B F# A

E B G A Bb D'

Consonant Fits Compliments Dissonant Clashes

Jun 8-7:46 AM

Examples of 5th Grade Consonant and Dissonant Choices

June 13, 2010

The I Chord (E⁷)
E B D

E B D

Consonant Fits Compliments Dissonant Clashes

The IV Chord (A⁷)
A E G

A E G

Consonant Fits Compliments Dissonant Clashes

The V Chord (B⁷)
B F# A

B F# A

Consonant Fits Compliments Dissonant Clashes

The I Chord (E⁷)
E B D

E B D

Consonant Fits Compliments Dissonant Clashes

The IV Chord (A⁷)
A E G

A E G

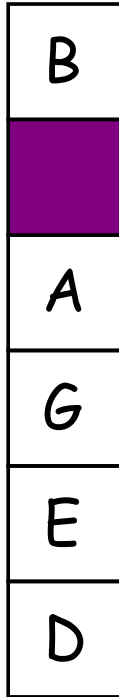
Consonant Fits Compliments Dissonant Clashes

The V Chord (B⁷)
B F# A

B F# A

Consonant Fits Compliments Dissonant Clashes

The E minor Pentatonic Pitch Ladder
No Bb



**The E minor Pentatonic Pitch Ladder
With Bb**

