

Teaching and Learning Strategies for Middle/High School
From
“The Making of Milwaukee” Curriculum

Music:
Teaching and Learning about Milwaukee through Music

The following activity is from “The Making of Milwaukee” on-line curriculum:

- **Singing the Blues in Milwaukee** (Creating a Blues Tune)

SINGING THE BLUES IN MILWAUKEE

***Note to Teachers: Video Chapter 13 complements this lesson activity.*

During times of war and peace a number of Milwaukeeans faced discrimination, insult, and even violence. Groups and individuals were hated and unaccepted in Milwaukee for a variety of reasons. Historically, one outlet for dealing with oppression has been music. During the early and into the mid-1900’s musical forms like the blues became increasingly widespread and well known across the United States.

1. Have students create a blues song that addresses the discrimination and cruelty that different groups in Milwaukee faced during this period of time (e.g. African Americans, Hispanics, German Americans, Catholics, Jewish Americans, etc.). As students watch any of the video chapters from this unit they should pay close attention to groups who experienced discrimination and the ways they were victimized. Students should also consider the ways individuals in these groups may have been affected by this intolerance. The following questions can serve to help guide their thoughts about discrimination against various groups in Milwaukee during this time.
 - Why did this particular group face discrimination?
 - In what ways did this group, as a whole, face discrimination?
 - How were individuals in this group possibly affected by discrimination in different ways?
 - How could or did this group try to fight against discrimination?
 - What lasting impact do you think this discrimination has on the city of Milwaukee today?

2. After students answer or discuss these questions, they can begin to think about writing their blues song.

- a. If the teacher has a fairly strong understanding of music, the following websites can assist him or her with helping students write a truly unique blues song:

<http://www.wpsweb.com/performingarts/BrownBagJazz/blues.htm>

<http://www.pbs.org/theblues/classroom/essays12bar.html>

- b. If the teacher is new to the blues, the following website offers clips of blues songs that students could possibly use to create their own songs:

<http://www.pbs.org/theblues/classroom/cd.html>

- c. If neither of the above options works well, simply have students choose one of their favorite sad, slow or moving songs (it does not have to be a blues song) and use the rhythm or melody to write their own song lyrics.
 - d. A final option might be to work with the school's music teacher to help students create these songs.
3. After students have written their songs, ask them to perform them for the rest of the class or simply have them discuss the lyrics with the rest of the class. Focus discussion on the multiple ways people faced discrimination during this period of time and the multiple ways people dealt with intolerance.
 4. The teacher might want to end the discussion by asking students if they think music is as an effective way to deal with discrimination. Students can also consider how any music today tries to address discrimination.

Follow-up Learning Activity:

- If the school or community has a variety show or talent competition, the teacher might want to encourage students to use their songs and performances as an entry in this activity.