Rivers of Rhythm: The Geography of Music

Audience Level: High School

Genre/Content Overview: (Geography, U.S. History, Language Arts, Listening and Speaking) In this lesson, students will explore the diaspora of musical genres, particularly blues and jazz, throughout the United States.

Learning Objectives: Using textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources students will examine how the great migration impacted the development and spread of blues and jazz music. Students will use technology to produce, publish and update individual or shared written products.

Summary Description:
African American music was heavily impacted by the Great Migration. The movement of over six million African Americans created a new and unique mixture of African American culture. The Great Migration was a movement between 1910-1970 of over six million African Americans from the rural South to cities of the North, Midwest, and West. African Americans created their own cities within cities, such as New York and Chicago. There they created and fostered their own African American culture that represented different regions of the African American experience.

Several factors including crop devastation, formation of the Ku Klux Klan, Jim Crow laws and the U.S. entering World War I and World War II (which demanded more labor in the North) impacted migration. Among those migrating to the North, East and West were blues and jazz musicians who saw a new market for their talents in the music industry. Through the migration blues and jazz music evolved and different styles were created that represented different regions of the United States.

Instructional Plan:
Task 1. The teacher will lead the class in a discussion of musical genres (jazz or blues)
   A. Define the genre—what is it?
   B. What makes the genre unique?
   C. Why and how did it start?
Task 2. Explore the geography of the genre
   A. Where did this genre of music get its beginnings?
   B. What is unique about that region/area?
   C. Why did the genre start here? How did the genre physically spread from this point? What were the push/pull factors that influenced movement and settlement? (i.e. river boats, Great Migration from rural South to industrial North, etc.)
Task 3. Student groups
A. The teacher may want to divide the students into small groups of 4.
B. The teacher will encourage the groups to explore and experiment with their chosen genres of music. Encourage student groups to think about/feel/write their own song lyrics and music.
C. The teacher will have groups explore the lives of real jazz or blues musicians (ex. B.B. King, Robert Johnson, John Lee Hooker, Bessie Smith, Son House, Muddy Waters, Etta James, Billie Holiday, Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Ray Charles).
D. Have student groups create a map of one to two musicians’ life experiences/movements using Google Map Maker. Discuss how this movement reflects the movement of the overall genre of music.

Possible Extension Activities:
a. Have student groups create a video/audio montage of different artists from their selected genres.
b. Have student groups create an online brochure/webpage/blog that interprets the movement of the selected musical genre over time.
c. Conduct a similar analysis of the diaspora of songs of the Civil Rights Movement. Do these songs have the same movement pattern? Why or why not?

Resources and Materials for the Lesson and for Extension Activities:
www.riversofrhythm.org
www.pbs.org/theblues --This is the companion website to the 7-part PBS documentary on The Blues
www.pbs.org/jazz --This is the companion website to the Ken Burns documentary film, Jazz, that aired on PBS
Maps (electronic and/or desk) of the United States
Google Map Maker
Samples of New Orleans, St. Louis and Chicago jazz
Samples of Delta, Memphis and Chicago blues
Access to the Mississippi Blues Trail website -- msbluestrail.org
Cornell Notes taking graphic organizer
Cornell Notes Strategy & Description