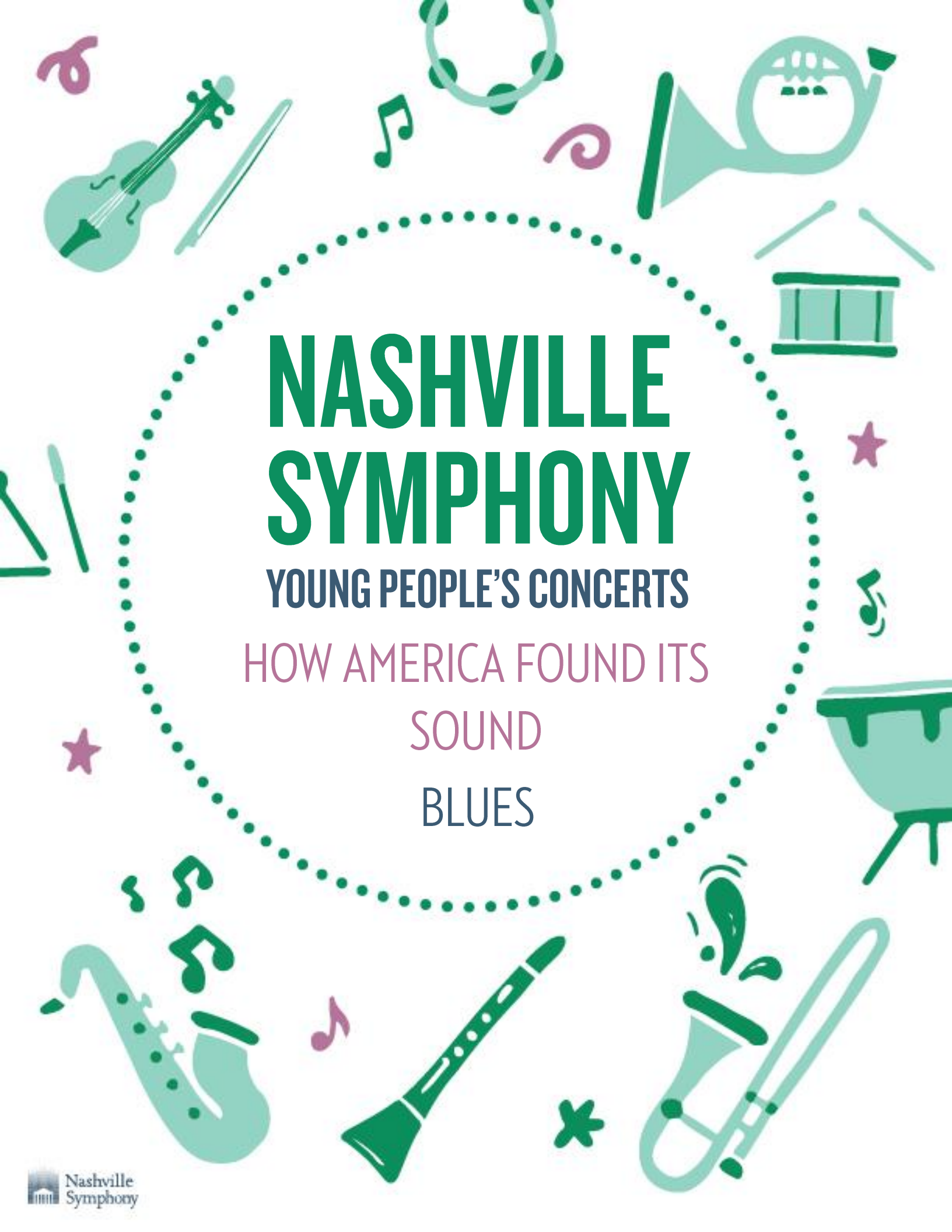




NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

YOUNG PEOPLE'S CONCERTS

HOW AMERICA FOUND ITS
SOUND
BLUES

HOW AMERICA FOUND ITS SOUND

BLUES

Grades 5 - 8

STANDARDS

5.GM.Cr2.B, 5.GM.Cr3.B, 5.GM.R1.C, 6.GM.P1.B, 6.GM.P3.A, 6.GM.Cr1.A, 7.GM.P3.A, 7.GM.Cr1.A, 7.GM.Cr2.A, 8.GM.Cn2.A, 8.GM.R2.A, 8.GM.R1.B

OBJECTIVES

Students will describe the characteristics and emotional expression of blues music.

Students will identify the AAB song structure commonly found in blues music.

Students will create original lyrics using the AAB blues song form.

TIME NEEDED

45 - 60 minutes

MATERIALS

- Video: [Seasonal Sadness | Inside Out | Official Clip](#)
- Video: [Cross Road Blues - Robert Johnson \(1936\)](#)
- Video: [Bessie Smith - Poor Man's Blues \(Audio\)](#)
- Video: [Muddy Waters - Got My Mojo Workin'](#)

GENRE OVERVIEW

The Blues developed in the late 1800s in the American South from the experiences, traditions, and musical expressions of African Americans. Rooted in work songs, spirituals, and field hollers, the blues gave people a way to express their feelings and share everyday life through music. Spirituals, Gospel, and the Blues share many of the same musical features, including expressive singing, call-and-response, and emotional storytelling, but they often focus on different themes.

Blues songs often express "blue" feelings, like sadness, disappointment, or frustration, and follow an AAB song structure, where the first line is repeated and the third line finishes the thought. The Blues also became one of the most important foundations of jazz, influencing its rhythms, melodies, and improvisation. Together, the blues, gospel, and jazz have shaped many styles of American music and continue to inspire musicians today.

Smithsonian National Museum of American History, *The Blues*.

<https://www.si.edu/spotlight/african-american-music/jazz-blues?>

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PROCEDURES:

1. Say: We're going to watch a video of a character, and as you're watching, think about "What makes this character "blue?"

- Video: [Seasonal Sadness | Inside Out | Official Clip](#)

2. Discuss: What makes this character "blue?"

3. Say: Now we are going to listen to a recording of a song by Robert Johnson, as you are listening, think about what makes this SONG "blue?"

- Video: [Cross Road Blues - Robert Johnson \(1936\)](#)

4. Discuss: What makes this song "blue?"

5. Say: Blues songs often express "**blue**" **feelings** like sadness, disappointment, or frustration. Also, they share these feelings in a very particular pattern. Let's see if we can figure it out together.

Many blues songs follow a pattern called **AAB**. That means:

- The first line is sung.
- The same line is repeated.
- The third line finishes the idea.

6. Say: As you listen, see if you can hear the words from the line that is repeated?

- Video: [Bessie Smith - Poor Man's Blues \(Audio\)](#)

VERSE 1:

(A) *Rich Man, Rich Man, open up your heart and mind.*

(A) *Mr. Rich Man, Rich Man, open up your heart and mind.*

(B) *Give a poor man a chance, help stop these hard, hard times*

VERSE 2:

(A) *While you're livin' in your mansion, you don't know what hard time means*

(A) *While you're livin' in your mansion, you don't know what hard time means*

(B) *Oh, workin' man's wife is starvin', your life is livin' like a queen*

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PROCEDURES CONTINUED:

Background on Bessie Smith: Bessie Smith (ca. 1895–1937) was a blues and jazz singer from the Harlem Renaissance who is remembered as the Empress of the Blues. ([NMAAH](#)) Three of her songs have been inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame: “Empty Bed Blues” (1983), “St. Louis Blues” (1993), and “Downhearted Blues” (2006). Smith herself was inducted into the National Women’s Hall of Fame in 1984 and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1989. Bessie Smith one of the highest paid blues singers of her time.

7. Discuss: What words/lines did you hear repeated in the first verse? What words/lines did you hear repeated in the second verse? How are these lyrics “blue?”
BONUS: How is her singing “blue?”

8. Activity: Write Our Own Blues Song

Say: Blues songs often tell stories about everyday problems. They don't have to be huge problems, they can even be funny! Let's write one together.

[Blues Backing Track](#)

Blues Song Libs

Line 1

*I woke up on **(day of week)** feeling **(emotion)** because my **(object)** disappeared.*

Line 2

*I woke up on **(day of week)** feeling **(emotion)** because my **(object)** disappeared.*

Line 3

*Now I'm **(verb ending in -ing)** with a **(color)** **(animal)** in **(place)** while **(person)** eats my **(favorite food)** after **(school subject)**.*

Example

*I woke up on **Monday** feeling **grumpy** because my **backpack** disappeared.*

*I woke up on **Monday** feeling **grumpy** because my **backpack** disappeared.*

*Now I'm **running** with a **purple squirrel** in **the cafeteria** while **my principal** eats my **pizza** after **math**.*

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