

# American Voices

## Ma Rainey's Black Bottom: Lesson 4 Student Assessment

### SONGWRITING: Sing Your Blues!

The lyrics of the Blues are simple and direct. They are very honest, personal expressions dealing with basic concerns that can trouble one's life. They embody both grief and the reason for it. In this way, blues lyrics convey hope. They allow people to get a handle on their own problems.

In the Blues, each 12-bar section represents a verse that consists of three lines. The first line of the verse states the situation, and the second repeats the words exactly (but adds a different inflection to them), assuring clarity and building tension. The third (the rhyming line) resolves the situation. The last word of the third line should rhyme with the last word of the first and second lines.

A: *Gonna lay my head down on the railroad track*  
A: *Gonna lay my head down on the railroad track*  
B: *If the train come 'long, I'm gonna snatch it back.*

If the third line seems humorous-it is intentional. The third line often dashes the self-pity that was built up in the first and second line.

Charles Fowler, Timothy Gerber, and Vincent Lawrence. *Music: Its Role and Importance in Our Lives*  
New York: Glencoe McGraw-Hill, 2000.

### Student Activity:

In groups of three, students write their own Blues song using the following guidelines:

- 1) Listen to the Blues instrumental track. (You will set your lyrics to this music.) It has a two measure (8 beats) introduction.
- 2) Decide a specific concern. Decide what is your 'blues' you want to write a song about.
- 3) Create the lyrics to your song using the template provided.
- 4) Put it all together by setting it to the 12-bar audio structure provided. Stage it!

### Blues Song Template:

In the blues lyric template given, students should consider the following:

- The lyrics should follow a 12-bar structure like the above example song.
- The song should reflect a personal, specific concern (about love, parents, homework, chores, etc...), the reason for it, and, finally, a humorous way to resolve the concern.
- In verse 1, students identify problem. By verse 3, the lyrics should present a resolution or effect of identified problem in verse one. The progression from verse 1 to 3 will portray a clear beginning, middle, and end OR cause and effect.
- The chorus should portray the songwriter's "big idea" about the song (i.e. an emotional response).

#### Teacher Tip:

*Play the provided Blues track and count out each verse/chorus to give the feeling of the 12-bar structure. The words to each line should end around the end of "Two, 2, 3, 4" or beginning of "Three, 2, 3, 4".*

A: "One, 2, 3, 4 - Two, 2, 3, 4 - Three, 2, 3, 4 - Four 2, 3, 4"  
A: "One, 2, 3, 4 - Two, 2, 3, 4 - Three, 2, 3, 4 - Four 2, 3, 4"  
B: "One, 2, 3, 4 - Two, 2, 3, 4 - Three, 2, 3, 4 - Four 2, 3, 4"

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### BLUES SONG TEMPLATE

#### VERSE #1 = 3 LINES

A: \_\_\_\_\_

A (repeat 1<sup>st</sup> line): \_\_\_\_\_

B: \_\_\_\_\_

#### VERSE #2 = 3 LINES

A: \_\_\_\_\_

A (repeat 1<sup>st</sup> line): \_\_\_\_\_

B: \_\_\_\_\_

#### CHORUS = 3 LINES

A: \_\_\_\_\_

A (repeat 1<sup>st</sup> line): \_\_\_\_\_

B: \_\_\_\_\_

#### VERSE #3 = 3 LINES

A: \_\_\_\_\_

A (repeat 1<sup>st</sup> line): \_\_\_\_\_

B: \_\_\_\_\_

#### CHORUS = 3 LINES (same as above chorus)

A: \_\_\_\_\_

A (repeat 1<sup>st</sup> line): \_\_\_\_\_

B: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Blues Song Rubric:

- Go over rubric criteria with students so they are clear on what they will be graded on.
- Use rubric to assess achievement in the group exercise.
- Encourage students to provide feedback to each other using the rubric (i.e. peer-to-peer assessment).

	Highest Level/Exemplary 85-100	Middle Level/Satisfactory 65-84	Lowest Level/Unsatisfactory 0-64
<b>SONG STRUCTURE</b> (up to 25 points)  Score _____	<b>(22-25 points)</b> - Lyrics fit within 12-bar structure throughout song  -Last word of every line B consistently rhymes with last word of lines A	<b>(17-21 points)</b> -Lyrics moderately fit within 12-bar structure  -Last word of every line B moderately or inconsistently rhymes with last word of lines A	<b>(0-16 points)</b> -Use of 12-bar structure is unclear or absent  -Last word of every line B does not rhyme with last word of lines A
<b>SONG LYRICS</b> (up to 25 points)  Score _____	<b>(22-25 points)</b> -The verse progression clearly delineates a problem with resolution  -Use of humor is present	<b>(17-21 points)</b> -The verse progression moderately or inconsistently delineates a problem with resolution  -Use of humor is sometimes present	<b>(0-16 points)</b> -The verse progression delineating a problem with resolution is unclear or absent  - Use of humor is unclear or absent
<b>RELATIONSHIP/ COLLABORATION</b> (up to 25 points)  Score _____	<b>(22-25 points)</b> - Contribution to group partners is strong (i.e. adding ideas, critiquing other's ideas)  -Individual actively listens to others	<b>(17-21 points)</b> -Contribution to group partners is moderate or inconsistent  -Individual moderately listens to others	<b>(0-16 points)</b> - Contribution to group partners is weak or non-existent  -Individual did not listen to others
<b>PERFORMANCE/ SHARING OF SONG</b> (up to 25 points)  Score _____	<b>(22-25 points)</b> -Group is completely audible  - Diction is completely clear  - Group uses vocal variety appropriately throughout performance (i.e. pitch, volume, and tempo)  -Different inflection on 2 <sup>nd</sup> line of verse is present, giving nuance to repeated line	<b>(17-21 points)</b> - Group is moderately audible  - Diction is moderately clear  - Group somewhat uses vocal variety  -Different inflection on 2 <sup>nd</sup> line of verses is sometimes present,	<b>(0-16 points)</b> - Group is minimally or not audible  -Diction is muddy or not clear  - Group uses little or no vocal variation  -Different inflection on 2 <sup>nd</sup> line of verse is minimal or absent, giving no nuance to repeated line
<b>TOTAL</b> _____			

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## *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*: Lesson 4 Student Assessment

### Essay Topic:

After analyzing both "Black-On-Black Violence" articles and the text from *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, write an opinion essay explaining how external white oppression may have contributed to African Americans taking their anger out on each other rather than on those oppressing them.

- Why would that have been possible?
- Why act out against one's own culture, ethnic or racial group?
- How did white oppression affect identity and survival of African Americans?
- How does one respond to overt oppression?

### Good points to research for essay...

- Encourage students to use resources from American Voices (*Ma Rainey's Black Bottom's* song lyrics, "Strange Fruit" lyrics, other Blues songs, experiences from group theater activities, etc... as references as well as other source material they research themselves.
- The Great Black Migration between 1910 and 1970
- Southern life issues including sharecropping, natural disasters of 1910s and '20s, Jim Crow legislation, segregation, Klu Klux Klan, public lynchings

### "Black-On-Black Violence" Essay Rubric:

- Go over rubric criteria with students to inform them on what they will be graded.
- Use rubric to assess achievement in the essay writing activity.

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## Ma Rainey's Black Bottom: Lesson 4

### "Black-On-Black Violence" Essay Rubric:

	Responses at the Highest Level 85-100*	Responses at the Middle Level 65-84	Responses at the Lowest Level 0-64
<p><b>MEANING</b> The extent to which the response exhibits understanding of the topic</p> <p>(Up to 50 points)</p> <p>SCORE _____</p>	<p>(43-50 points)</p> <p><b>Fully supports topic and opinions by use of article, play's text, or other resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Uses 3 or more examples to make case for how white oppression affected African American identity and survival during <i>Ma Rainey's</i> era (i.e. 1920's)</li> <li>- Makes clear connection between <i>Ma Rainey</i> and the <i>Black-on-Black Violence</i> articles to inform opinion</li> <li>- Essay incorporates 3 or more solutions that the student can actively do to alleviate these ongoing issues today</li> <li>- Explicit references to <i>Ma Rainey's Black Bottom</i>, the articles, and/or other cited resources</li> </ul>	<p>(33-42 points)</p> <p><b>Describes topic and opinions by use of article, play's text, or other resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Uses 2 or fewer examples to make case</li> <li>- Makes some connection between <i>Ma Rainey</i> and the <i>Black-on-Black Violence</i> articles to form opinion</li> <li>- Essay incorporates 2 or fewer solutions</li> <li>- Some references to <i>Ma Rainey's Black Bottom</i>, the articles, and/or other cited resources</li> </ul>	<p>(0-32 points)</p> <p><b>Superficially describes topic and opinions by use of article, play's text, or other resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Uses 1 or no examples to make case</li> <li>- Makes little or no connection</li> <li>- Essay incorporates 1 or no solutions</li> <li>- Poor or no references to <i>Ma Rainey's Black Bottom</i>, the articles, and/or other cited resources</li> </ul>
<p><b>Development and Organization:</b> The extent to which the ideas are explained using specific and relevant information exhibiting direction and coherence</p> <p>(Up to 25 points)</p> <p>SCORE _____</p>	<p>(22-25 points)</p> <p><b>Develop ideas clearly and fully</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- maintains a consistent focus on the prompt</li> <li>- exhibits a logical and coherent structure</li> </ul>	<p>(17-21 points)</p> <p><b>Develop ideas clearly</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- maintains basic focus and structure, but may have some inconsistencies or meandering</li> <li>- maintains a direction and coherence</li> </ul>	<p>(0-16 points)</p> <p><b>Develop ideas minimally</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- lacks clear focus and structure</li> </ul>
<p><b>Use of English Language Arts Conventions:</b> Effective use of sentence structure, sentence variety, spelling, punctuation, paragraphing, capitalization and grammar.</p> <p>(Up to 25 points)</p> <p>SCORE _____</p>	<p>(22-25 points)</p> <p><b>Use precise language with awareness of purpose</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- varies structure and length of sentences for effect</li> <li>- demonstrates control of writing conventions</li> <li>- uses sophisticated vocabulary</li> </ul>	<p>(17-21 points)</p> <p><b>Use appropriate language with some awareness of purpose</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- occasionally varies structure and length of sentences</li> <li>- demonstrates partial control of writing conventions with some errors which do not hinder comprehension</li> <li>- uses appropriate grade level vocabulary</li> </ul>	<p>(0-16 points)</p> <p><b>Use simple language that is imprecise or unrelated</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- sentences lack variety and are constructed incorrectly</li> <li>- demonstrates a lack of control of writing conventions including many errors that make comprehension difficult</li> <li>- uses simple or below grade level vocabulary</li> </ul>
<p><b>TOTAL</b> _____</p>			

\*Please note that the point distribution is a mere suggestion. Please adjust if needed.