

The Slave Trade and Blues music

KS2 (this activity could also be adapted for KS1)

This activity is designed to introduce children to historic links between blues music and slavery. The children will use vocal and spoken-word skills to create a song or protest chant against racism.

Linked 'Celebrating Musical Role Models' minutes:

Minute #6 Broke and Hungry

Minute #13 Dry Bones: Ezekiel Saw the Wheel

Minute #19 Lost John

Minute #20 New York String Band

Links to National Curriculum	<p>Geography: Locational knowledge</p> <p>Music: Develop an understanding of the history of music</p> <p>Music: Appreciate and understand a wide range of high quality live and recorded music drawn from different traditions and from great composers and musicians.</p> <p>Music: Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes using the inter-related dimensions of music.</p>
Resources	Minute of Listening 'Celebrating Musical Role Models' collection
Key Vocabulary	Blues, slaves, slavery, Africa, America, Britain, Transatlantic
Input	<p>Explain that we are going to use music and words to create a song or chant against racial discrimination.</p> <p>Additional info - African-American spirituals is a genre of music that is "purely and solely the creation" of generations of African Americans, which merged African cultural heritage with the experiences of being held in bondage in slavery, at first during the transatlantic slave trade—the largest and one of the most inhumane forced migrations in recorded human history, and for centuries afterwards, through the domestic slave trade. Spirituals encompass the "sing songs," work songs, and plantation songs that evolved into the blues and gospel songs in church. In the nineteenth century, the word "spirituals" referred to all these subcategories of folk songs. While they were often rooted in biblical stories, they also described the extreme hardships endured by African Americans who were enslaved from the 17th century until the 1860s, the emancipation altering mainly the nature (but not continuation) of slavery for many. Many new derivative music genres emerged from the spirituals songcraft.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First, we need to understand what slavery is (there is some information about slavery in the supporting information below). • Listen to Black History Month minute #6 Broke and Hungry. • <i>Discuss how do you think the singer is feeling in this song. Is he happy, sad, angry, excited? He seems to be sad – and he says "I'm broke and I'm hungry".</i> • This music is called Blues. We say "I've got the blues" to mean "I'm feeling sad". The music takes its inspiration from sadness; it turns that feeling into something poetic and beautiful. It tells stories that we can all understand, and often uses quite simple structures. <p>Additional info - Blues is a music genre and musical form which was originated in the Deep South of the United States around the 1860s by African-Americans from roots in African-American work songs, and spirituals. Blues incorporated spirituals, work songs, field hollers, shouts, chants, and rhymed simple narrative ballads. The blues</p>



	<p>form, ubiquitous in jazz, rhythm and blues and rock and roll, is characterized by the call-and-response pattern, the blues scale and specific chord progressions, of which the twelve-bar blues is the most common. Blue notes (or "worried notes"), usually thirds, fifths or sevenths flattened in pitch are also an essential part of the sound. Blues shuffles or walking bass reinforce the trance-like rhythm and form a repetitive effect known as the groove.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • The performer of Broke and Hungry, Memphis Slim, was from Memphis in the south of America. As part of the great migration he moved north to Chicago and helped to develop the blues there. • <i>Discuss with the children what do they think Memphis Slim was trying to say?</i> • Now listen to 'Celebrating Musical Role Models' minute #13 Dry Bones: Ezekiel Saw the Wheel • This is a recording of a song about the body. It is a spiritual song which means it is a Christian song about the bible. The song is also connected with parts of Western Africa because songs like these were sung by slaves who had been forcefully transported to American to do painful labour on plantations. They created songs as a way of keeping their spirits up whilst working. It is known that on some plantations slaves were allowed to drum and make music for themselves when they were not working. However, in the 18th century, plantation owners began to fear that drums could be used to incite revolt and some colonies prohibited their use. If the drum was ever played by slaves on the plantation it may, at some point, have been confiscated by the plantation owner. Drums might have been banned during the era of slavery in North America, but the music and dance of Africa would become a powerful force in modern American culture. The story of this Akan drum is one of both despair and of hope. • Music became an important way for slaves to express emotions about mistreatment, hardship and pain. The songs created at this time have influenced lots of later African-American music including Soul, Jazz and Funk. • <i>Discuss with the children what do they think the song was trying to say?</i> • <i>How does it make them feel?</i>
Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask the children to come up with anti-racist chants, songs or poems that they would use at a protest a protest against racism. Ask them to think about recent Black Lives Matter protests, the death of George Floyd. The chants songs, or poems should reflect how racism is still prevalent around the world today. Ask them to use instruments and words that reflect their emotions of anger towards racism. • Key aspects to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What languages could you include? ○ Rhyming words ○ Different instruments ○ Dynamics ○ Call and response ○ Rhythm <p>Encourage the children to think about which instruments and dynamics they could also include to reflect each emotion e.g. strength might be a drum beat, or crescendo could signify intensity.</p> <p>Invite the children to share their chant/ song and have the class join in.</p>



Supporting information	<p>What is slavery?</p> <p>Slavery is the treatment of human beings as property. This means they have their liberty and rights taken away from them for the benefit of another person. Slavery has happened, and continues to happen in all societies. The Transatlantic Slave trade resulted in the enslavement and deaths of millions of people. It was at its peak during the 18th century when Britain was the most prominent trading nation. Furthermore, the transatlantic slave trade helped to solidify racialised violence and racialised hierarchies which was perpetuated by European Elites.</p> <p>Beginning in the early 1600s, Europeans forced, enslaved and transported millions of people from parts of West Africa across the Atlantic Ocean in horrific conditions. They were bought to America by ships which took months at sea. The ships were overcrowded, unsanitary and filthy. Many people died before even arriving at their destination.</p> <p>Slaves were treated as property, and were sold into a life of unpaid and tortuous work once arriving in the Americas and the Caribbean. Slaves were forced to work on plantations growing crops such as sugar, cotton, tobacco and tea in arduous conditions. Europeans heavily benefited socially and financially from exploiting people through the slave trade. The slave trade funded the Industrial revolution, exports and manufacturing, ports, finance in London, Bristol, Liverpool, Birmingham, Wales, Scotland and Ireland and wealthy individuals. Much of Britain that we see today (see resources below for more info) was funded by the horrific and inhumane transatlantic slave trade.</p> <p>The UK and Abolition:</p> <p>After much resistance in the British overseas colonies, which came about in the shape of decolonial conflicts meaning Britain was losing its hold over its former colonies, and further resistance from abolitionists and human rights campaigners, Slavery was abolished in Britain. There were many of those who worked tirelessly to abolish the slave trade including Black/Black British abolitionists like:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mary Prince the first Black women to publish her life story (1788 - 1833) 2. Ottobah Cugoano: The first African to publicly demand total abolition (1757-1791) 3. Olaudah Equiano (1745 - 1797) campaigner, writer and explorer 4. Ukawsaw Gronniosaw: Author of the first book by an African author published in England 5. Louis Celeste Lecesne: <p>Although the British 'Abolished' slavery, they didn't stop utilising slaver labour for their cotton and sugar production until 1833 and the William Wilberforce's Slave Trade Act of 1807 outlawed the slave trade in the British Empire highlighting how Britain clearly had a conflict a moral and financial conflict of interest.</p> <p>When Slavery was abolished, the British government paid slave traders today's equivalent of 17 billion pounds in compensation. The government took a loan out to pay for this, and it was only paid off by British taxpayers in 2015 highlighting to us how the effects of the slave trade still impact us in the present day. Furthermore, back in 2013 the British government Burned 1000s of documents about their involvement in Africa, specifically regarding the treatment of Mau Mau people in Kenya, the operation of burning the documents was known as project legacy.</p>
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However, slavery still continued through smuggling and in the form of indentured labour. After abolition, Britain replaced slave labour with 'Indentured labour'. Indentured labourers were from British colonies such as India, China, and the Pacific. They were bound by exploitative contracts which meant they were bonded in deceitful conditions.

The US and Abolition:

After the American revolution many northern states in America outlawed slavery. Many southern states didn't want to outlaw slavery. It took until Abraham Lincoln became president and gave the emancipation proclamation in 1863 that slaves in the south began to be freed. It paved the way for the 13th Amendment in 1865 which outlawed slavery and became part of the United States Constitution, however, there is a loophole in the amendment as it made an exception for those convicted of a crime. The loophole in the constitution's ban on slavery not only allowed slavery to continue but launched an era of discrimination and mass incarceration that continues to this day. (the American constitution is the highest form of law in America that protects citizens and gives them basic rights).

Full Civil Rights were not given to African Americans until 1965 (see lesson plan on Rosa Parks). However, even today Black people in America are still unequal because of how engrained racism is in the US (and throughout the world). This is called 'Institutional Racism'.

Definitions:

Abolitionist – Someone who campaigns for abolishing slavery

Indenture – a form of contracted servitude for a long, fixed period of time in return for a free passage home, with the promise of land/money at the end.

Additional
resources:

The slavery abolition movement in Britain:

<https://heritagecalling.com/2016/11/14/5-black-heroes-of-the-abolition-movement-in-britain/>

Key Figures include:

Mary Prince - **http://abolition.e2bn.org/people_37.html**

Ottobah Cugoano - **http://abolition.e2bn.org/people_26.html**

Olaudah Equiano - **http://abolition.e2bn.org/people_25.html**

Britain, Wealth and the Slave Trade:

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/addressing-the-histories-of-slavery-and-colonialism-at-the-national-trust>

Map of Britain's slave ownership legacies - **<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/maps/britain/>**



