

Musical Impressions

Summary

In this activity, students will listen to two examples of bluegrass music and try to identify the instruments that they hear and the subtle differences between the two songs. Students will have the opportunity to describe their impressions of the selections, then will conclude by comparing and contrasting the two different songs.

Objectives

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- identify different instruments when listening to a bluegrass song
- compare and contrast two examples of bluegrass music
- describe how other genres of music borrowed from the bluegrass sound

Time

1 period

Background

Although early bluegrass musicians like Bill Monroe borrowed from many sources, including blues, gospel and jazz, the sound and style of bluegrass music was unique to listeners of the day. Bluegrass became more and more popular as other musicians began to add to the bluegrass sound to make it their own. Then, just as bluegrass musicians borrowed from other musical genres, musicians of new genres, like rock-and-roll legend Elvis Presley, borrowed some of the bluegrass lyrics and tunes to incorporate into their own developing styles.

Teacher's Notes

This lesson takes advantage of the Internet by providing a way for you and your students to easily access examples of bluegrass music. You may want to model the activity by making an overhead transparency of the worksheet and listening to the audio examples as a whole class. You can extend the activity by selecting two additional songs for students to compare and reflect upon as a group or individually. For additional musical resources, consult the Resources section at the back of this guide or explore the selections available in your local library.

Vocabulary

Clawhammer, dobro, Grand Ole Opry, rockabilly, waltz

Materials

Access to the sites [ALIVE!](#) website, 2+ bluegrass audio examples (“**The Bluegrass Sound**” and “**Rolling Breaker Blues**” and/or see the Resources section for further suggestions), copies of the *Musical Impressions Worksheet* (**provided**), copies of the *Comparison H-Chart* (**provided**);

Optional: overhead projector, transparency of worksheet

Procedure

1. Begin by choosing two bluegrass audio examples, preferably from different musicians and/or eras, to use in the activity. We have provided two possible examples: “The Bluegrass Sound” and “Rolling Breaker Blues,” both by Jack Tottle. The first song is a traditional, “Monroe-style” song, while the second is from a later era and includes the use of a dobro. If you prefer, consult the Resources section at the back of this guide or your local library for further selection suggestions.
2. Next, have students read through the online essays that discuss how bluegrass music evolved over the years.
3. Provide each student with a *Musical Impressions Worksheet*, then read over the directions together.
4. Have students listen to the two bluegrass audio examples you have chosen. Instruct them to fill in their responses on the worksheet as they listen. If necessary, repeat the songs (or parts of the songs) so that students can acquire a complete impression of the music.
5. After students have listened to the songs and completed the worksheet, have them share their responses with the class as a whole.

Extend the Experience

Provide students with copies of the *Comparison H-Chart*, then instruct them to compare and contrast their two audio examples again, using the chart to graphically demonstrate their points.

Musical Impressions Worksheet

Directions: Listen to two examples of bluegrass music, preferably by different musicians and/or of different musical eras. Try to identify the instruments you hear, and also listen for similarities and differences between the two songs. Write your personal reflections about each song in the boxes below.

	Song #1:	Song #2:
What instruments did you hear while listening to this song?		
How many musicians do you think are playing in this song?		
What is the tone and/or mood of this song?		
What does this song remind you of?		
How would you rate this song, on a scale of 1-10 (10 is best)?		
Why did you give this song the above rating?		
Draw what comes to your mind when listening to this song.		

Comparison H-Chart

Directions: Use this chart to graphically compare and contrast two bluegrass audio examples. Use the larger columns to provide information about the unique qualities of each audio example. Use the space in the middle to list those qualities that the two audio examples have in common.

The image shows a blank Comparison H-Chart template. It consists of two large, empty rectangular boxes on the left and right sides, intended for listing unique qualities of two different audio examples. A smaller, empty rectangular box is positioned in the center, between the two larger boxes, intended for listing common qualities. The entire chart is enclosed in a thin black border.