

# Introduction to Bluegrass

## Summary

In this activity, students will be introduced to bluegrass music, then encouraged to demonstrate what they learned and to highlight the facts that they found most interesting through the completion of a worksheet and a K-W-L chart.

## Objectives

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

- identify some of the founding musicians of the bluegrass sound
- list the instruments most frequently used to play bluegrass
- explain how bluegrass music changed and evolved over the years

## Time

1 period

## Background

Bluegrass is one of America's great musical traditions. It originated in the 1930s and 1940s in the Southern Appalachians, where it was played most notably by Bill Monroe and his famous Blue Grass Boys. A melding of traditional mountain music, jazz, blues, gospel and country music, bluegrass is almost always played on acoustic stringed instruments, primarily the fiddle, mandolin, banjo, guitar, dobro and stand-up bass. The music is often very fast and the musicians play with great skill, taking turns at improvising on each song or tune. Bluegrass vocalists often sing very high in very tightly-arranged harmonies.

## Teacher's Notes

This lesson utilizes the instructional technique known as K-W-L, which allows teachers to activate students' prior knowledge by asking them what they already **K**now. After students have the opportunity to share what they already know, they can collaborate as a whole class or in small groups to set goals specifying what they **W**ant to learn. After reading the content on the website, students then have the opportunity to discuss what they have **L**earned and to evaluate whether or not some of their initial questions have been answered by their readings.

The K-W-L activity allows students to apply higher-order thinking strategies which help them to construct meaning from what they read and to monitor their progress toward their goals. At the completion of the eight-week Bluegrass Live! unit, you may want to revisit the K-W-L chart that you began in this first activity, in order to add to the Learn column and then evaluate again whether or not the initial questions were answered. Any subsequent unanswered questions can be submitted to the website or answered through additional student research.

Since this is the first lesson of an eight-week unit, you may want to make folders where students can keep all of their Bluegrass Live! information and worksheets. These folders will make it easier for students to reflect on their learning at the end of the unit.

## Vocabulary

Bill Monroe, acoustic, rural

## Materials

Paper, writing utensils (pens, pencils, markers, etc.), whiteboard or posterboard, *What is Bluegrass? Worksheet* (provided), access to sitesALIVE! website

## Procedure

1. Begin by introducing students to the Bluegrass Live! program that they will be using for the next eight weeks. Tell them that they will learn about bluegrass music by reading information on the website and also by listening to samples of music and video published on the site. Let them know that live musicians will contribute content each week to the website, and that they, as students, will be able to participate in the website, as well, by sending questions to these musicians. Explain that some of these questions will be published on the website with the musician's responses for all the world to see.
2. Pass out a blank piece of paper to each student. Have students fold the paper into thirds, then write the letters "K", "W", and "L" at the top of the respective columns (see below).

Know	Want to know	Learned
•	•	•
•	•	•
•	•	•

3. Ask students to write anything that they already know about bluegrass music in the "K" column. When they have completed the task, have students share their responses with the class. Write these responses on the board or on a large piece of posterboard that you can display throughout the program.
4. Have students write at least three questions they have about bluegrass music in the "W" column. When students are done, again have them share responses with the class and add the responses to the class K-W-L chart.
5. Pass out copies of the *What is Bluegrass? Worksheet* to each student.
6. Next, group students into pairs and have them read the essays, journals and Q & A on the website for Bluegrass Live! Week 1. As students read, have them pull out important details and write them on their worksheets to demonstrate their understanding.
7. After all students have had a chance to read the content on the website and complete the worksheet, gather the class together for sharing. As students share what they have learned, have them write responses in the "L" column on their K-W-L charts. In addition, add their responses to the class K-W-L chart.
8. Instruct students to hold on to their K-W-L charts as the class will review them at the end of the eight-week program. At that point in time, student can add to the list of what they have learned and evaluate whether or not their initial questions have been answered.

## Extend the Experience

Bluegrass music is increasingly popular and can be heard frequently in television commercials and movies. Instruct students to go on a week-long scavenger hunt, writing down where and when they hear examples of bluegrass music. In addition, have students go through recent newspapers and magazines to try to find articles or music reviews about bluegrass music. At the end of the week, have students share what they found with the class.

# What is Bluegrass? Worksheet

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Read the Bluegrass Live! essays, journals and Q & A. As you read, write at least one fact in each rectangle under the appropriate heading. For the Interesting Facts heading, please select the two facts you found most interesting of all those you learned.

