



Shout Sister Shout!

Lesson

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Grade Level: 8-10

Length: Three 55-minute classes

Introduction:

Cheryl L. West's musical *Shout Sister Shout!* amplifies the overlooked story of Sister Rosetta Tharpe, the American Gospel singer, guitarist, who many consider the Godmother of rock and roll. The musical adapts the biography *Shout, Sister, Shout!* by Dr. Gayle Wald. A prolific, courageous, and unapologetic Black female artist during America's early to mid-20th century, Sister Rosetta Tharpe transformed gospel music into an early iteration of rock and roll and R&B due to her prodigious guitar playing and charismatic singing style.

In this three-part lesson, students will learn about Sister Rosetta Tharpe's life and how she influenced artists who followed in her musical footsteps. In Lesson Two, students will explore various forms of music, and in Lesson Three, students will try their hand at becoming music pioneers. They will select an existing song and transform it into their style.

Educators may teach one lesson as a stand-alone or all three lessons sequentially.

Learning Objectives:

1. Describe Sister Rosetta Tharpe's influence on other artists, especially those who came after her.
2. Identify details about Sister Rosetta Tharpe's life.
3. Identify various music forms, including gospel and rock and roll music.
4. Compare/contrast various music forms.
5. Transform a piece of familiar music into something that reflects their style.

Guiding Questions:

1. Why is Sister Rosetta Tharpe considered the Godmother of rock and roll?
2. What factors might have caused her contributions to be overlooked?

3. How did she influence other artists? Why were they given credit instead of her?
4. How are music forms different? How are they alike?
5. How can we transform a piece of music into something that reflects our style? Why would we want to do that?

Standards:

National Arts Standards: Music

Creating

- Anchor standard 1. Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
MU:Cr1.1.8
- Anchor Standard 2. Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.
MU:Cr2.1.8

Responding

- Anchor Standard 7. Perceive and analyze artistic work.
MU:Re7.2.8

Connecting

- Anchor Standard 10. Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.
MU:Cn10.0.8
- Anchor Standard 11. Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.
MU:Cn11.0.8

Common Core History standards

- CCRA-R.7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
- 9-10.WHST.2.a. Introduce a topic and organize ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions
- 9-10.WHST.9. Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
- CCRA-W.7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- CCRA-W.9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Classroom Activities:

Lesson One: Who was Sister Rosetta Tharpe?

Lesson Two: Musical Forms

Lesson Three: Transforming and Creating

Lesson One: Who was Sister Rosetta Tharpe?

Intro (10 minutes)

As students enter class, play Sister Rosetta Tharpe’s music in the background.

Share with the students that they will investigate an overlooked historical figure. Ask the class to think about the word “overlooked.” What does this mean? How does it connect to history? Why might someone important to history be overlooked? Write their responses on the Smart Board/Flip Chart paper.

Share with the class that they will explore the life and legacy of Sister Rosetta Tharpe, a musician, and performer from the mid-1920s to the early 1970s. At the end of the lesson, students will share why Sister Rosetta Tharpe is important to the history of American music.

Learning Activity (30 minutes)

Jigsaw

Break students into three groups. Each group will research an element of Sister Rosetta Tharpe’s life, becoming the class “experts.” Groups will use a worksheet to capture information learned during their research. Use the attached resource list to provide students with sources for their research. If students have access to individual tablets (iPads, Chromebooks), students can also find sources online. Groups:

- Biography
- Historical context (What historical events and movements occurred during her lifetime? How were different demographic groups treated? What technology existed or was invented?)
- Music (genre, song repertoire, musicians she influenced)

Sharing (15 minutes)

Each group will have five minutes to present three main points from their research. As groups present, listening students should take notes.

Collect each group’s completed graphic organizers to assemble into a shareable resource for the class.

Extension activity

If time allows, do a human timeline activity, using the research found by the students and the timeline provided in the materials and resources section at the end of the lesson. Write or print out events on individual cards/sheets of paper. The students should collaborate to create a line in sequential order. Once the timeline is created, ask the students what they notice about Rosetta's life within the events on the timeline.

Exit ticket/Assessment

Students will respond to the prompt below on a sticky note, using evidence that they learned during their research or class discussion. Students will post it on a piece of flip chart paper as they exit the classroom:

"Sister Rosetta Tharpe is considered the Godmother of rock and roll because...." or "Sister Rosetta Tharpe should not be considered the Godmother of rock and roll because..."

Lesson Two: Musical Forms

Intro (10 minutes)

Before students enter, have the following questions on the board: "What do you know about Gospel music? What do you know about Blues music?" Have an area around or below each question for students to write their ideas. As students enter, allow them to discuss the questions with each other. Each student should write a response to what they know about each genre on the board before taking their seat.

Referencing what students wrote on the white board/Smart Board about Gospel music, share that Gospel music has its origins in the late 19th as Christian church music. It was more easily singable than traditional church hymns. Black Gospel music emerged as a distinct genre in the early 20th century. The instruments used in Gospel music were typically piano, tambourine, organ, drums. As the genre progressed, and due to the influence of Blues music, the bass guitar became part of the genre.

Mahalia Jackson became the most well-known Gospel singer of the 20th century. She and Sister Rosetta Tharpe were contemporaries and often recorded the same songs. Play a selection of Mahalia's version of "[Didn't It Rain](#)." Ask students what they noticed about her song. Share that they'll listen to Sister Rosetta's version later in the lesson.

Explain that today's activities will focus on exploring Blues music and how Sister Rosetta Tharpe infused elements of Blues music into the Gospel music tradition.

Learning Activities

Call and Response (10 minutes)

Clap a short pattern. Ask the students to repeat the clapped pattern. Tell the students when a pattern is repeated back between and forth between people, this is a musical form called an “Echo.” Play Sister Rosetta Tharpe’s [“Up Above my Head”](#) as an example of echo.

Ask students what they know about the “back beat.” Discuss that it is the rhythmic structure of the Blues, Gospel and early rock and roll music, based on four beats per measure, with the emphasis placed on the 2nd and 4th beat of the measure.

After this play, Sister Rosetta’s [“Didn’t It Rain.”](#) Students can clap along with the song to get a feel for the back beat. Ask the students how this version is different from Mahalia Jackson’s, e.g., are the instruments different? Is the tempo different?

Bring back the music form “echo.” Ask, “Did Sister Rosetta and the other singer sing at the same time? Did they sing the same pattern?” Since the response is not the same, this musical form is “Call and Response.” Another example of Call and Response is [“Down by the Riverside”](#) by Sister Rosetta Tharpe & The Sammy Price Trio. Listen to the first minute of this song. Direct students to listen for the Call and Response in the song. Let them choose a way to let you know when they hear the same form. (It might help to clue them that it will be in the vocals.) Ask students to think of other contemporary music examples of Call and Response.

AAB Form - (10 minutes)

Explain to the students that they will now explore a larger form than Call and Response. This is AAB, which is the cornerstone of the Blues. On their own or in pairs, students will look at the lyrics to [“Down the Dirt Road Blues”](#) by Charlie Patton. They will label each phrase like they would when labeling poetry. If able, play the song as students work. After they have finished, they will come back together as a class to discuss the large pattern that makes up each stanza. They should notice that two phrases are the same, followed by a different phrase. Label this form as AAB.

Improv Call & Response in the Blues (15 minutes)

Using the techniques from the Echo and Call & Response sections, take turns with the students improvising answers to a set question. Start with one question for students to answer all at once, e.g., “What’s for lunch?” “What’s your favorite color?” or “What’s your hobby?” Ask the question to the whole class several times, with all students responding at the same time (creating a cacophony of answers). Next ask the same question to students one by one. This can be done for as long as students enjoy it, and time allows. The questions can be changed after one round of students, or as they get comfortable, change the questions after each student to give them a challenge.

After this activity, listen to [“Cross Road Blues”](#) by Robert Johnson. Direct the students to listen for back-and-forth Call and Response between the vocals and guitar. Explain that

while the lyrics are set, the guitar part is improvised, much like their questions in the activity.

Closure (5 minutes)

Listen to "[There are Strange Things Happening Every Day](#)" by Sister Rosetta Tharpe. Divide students into two sections. One section will listen for Call & Response, and one will listen for improvisation from the guitar. Point out the AAB pattern as they listen.

Exit ticket/Assessment

Have students write their response to the prompt, "What is something new you learned that you didn't know when you entered class today?"

Lesson Three: Transforming and Creating

Intro (5 minutes)

Ask your students, to consider what they learned in lessons one and two and answer these questions:

- Why do you think the acoustic or electric guitar was not a regular instrument in Gospel music?
- What set Sister Rosetta Tharpe apart from other Gospel musicians?
- In what style of music would Sister Rosetta Tharpe have regularly heard the guitar?

Warm-Up (10 minutes)

Refresh the practices from lesson 2:

- Echo - Clapping pattern exercise.
- Call & Response - Question and answer exercise.

Ask: What is the main form that makes up the structure of the verses in the Blues?
(Answer: AAB)

Learning Activities

12 bar blues class song (20-30 minutes)

The Blues explores issues important to the musician and their community. Lead the students through lyric examples from Charline Patton, Bessie Smith, Muddy Waters, and Big Mama Thornton using the lyric examples resource listed in the materials below. The

class will collaborate to create a chorus in AAB form (either completely original or using the provided prompts), and each student will create a verse. Students will work on their own for their verse, using the provided lyric examples from the above-mentioned artists. If time allows, students can use [Ford's Warm & Cool feedback](#) protocol for peer review. Using the twelve-bar blues track provided the class will have the opportunity to share their song together. It is suggested that students not be required to share their verse, but that space is made where they may share. The form of the whole song should go chorus - verse 1 - chorus - verse 2 - etc.

Extension activity (10-15 minutes)

Lead the students in sharing some of the dominant musical genres in their community (their family, neighborhood, peers, city, etc.). Ask students to pick one genre and reflect on its importance. Why does it mean so much to their community? Ask them to take a risk like Tharp and transform a song from this genre. On a sheet of paper, they should write their responses to the prompts,

- How do they think they would do that?
- What instruments would they use?
- What would the song be about?
- How might they challenge traditional roles and stereotypes?
- Like Tharp brought the guitar to Gospel, what talents and knowledge do they have to bring to the genre?

Exit Ticket

Students turn in their verse and their written responses to transforming an existing song into something new (if time allowed).

Assessment:

Educators should use the Exit Tickets referenced in the lessons as assessment or create an assessment tool best suited for their curriculum requirements and student learning needs.

Materials and Resources Needed for the Lessons

- Jigsaw Research Graphic Organizer
- Shout Lesson Two Music Guides
- "Down the Dirt Road Blues" worksheet
- AAB Lyrics Examples
- Option: Timeline

- Optional: Warm and Cool Feedback protocol
- Various song selections referenced in lessons.

Extension Activity: Discussion Questions

1. What would you want to talk about with Sister Rosetta Tharpe if you could speak with her today? What are some questions you'd ask her? What would you share with her about music today?
2. In the play, Katie Bell says, "Always easier, Rosie, to leave a place than to find the gate unlocked when you wanna return." What do you think she means by this?
3. How might our community keep us from being our authentic selves? How do we navigate the tension between membership/belonging and being ourselves?
4. What does it mean to transform something? How is this different from creating? How is it the same?