

# Study Guide for Teachers

## Curtis Blues In *One-Man-Band Blues*

Presented by  
Young Audiences  
866-500-9265  
[www.yanj.org](http://www.yanj.org)



### ABOUT THE PROGRAM

This interactive program makes American music from the 1920s and 1930s come alive for students. Curtis Blues performs as a one man band - playing drums, harmonica, and vintage resonator guitars at the same time.

He demonstrates the history of acoustic instruments by playing a one string diddley bow and a homemade box guitar.

By taking these instruments into the audience for a closer look, every student is engaged in learning while enjoying the show.

### LEARNING GOALS

#### **Music:**

How music arises from people's culture.

#### **Social Studies and American History:**

How the migration of African Americans from the agricultural South to the industrial North is reflected in their music.

#### **Language Arts:**

How figurative language is used in songwriting, poetry, and creative writing.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

In the 1920s in Mississippi and other Southern states, African Americans created blues music using acoustic instruments. The music was based on work song rhythms such as ax songs which helped coordinate two men chopping down the same tree.

Early blues artists often made their own instruments when they couldn't afford them. These instruments included cigar box guitars and one-string diddley bows.

The blues evolved through the 1940's until it became electric band music and Chicago blues. The blues eventually evolved into Rock 'N Roll and Hip Hop music later on.

Blues is known for expressing genuine feelings about life and relationships. Far from being limited to sad music, blues is meant to express all of our feelings artistically, which leaves us feeling inspired.

## **BEFORE THE PROGRAM**

### **Pre-assembly questions for students:**

Ask what kinds of music students listen to and where they believe the music came from.

How do musicians invent new forms of music?

How is the kind of music you listen to different from what your parents or grandparents listen to?

If you didn't have any instruments, what could you build to make music?

How does listening to different kinds of music make you feel?

Can listening to music change the way you feel?

## **AFTER THE PROGRAM**

### **Post-assembly questions for students:**

What group of Americans invented the blues? When did they invent it?

What was unique to their life circumstances that shaped the way they made music?

When blues artists were young, what instruments did they build to make music with?

How are blues music and rock and hip hop different? How do forms of music evolve?

Can you think of any rhythm in the music you listen to that seems to be influenced by the ax song rhythms of the blues?

## **VOCABULARY WORDS**

**Blues Music** - A style of popular music invented by African Americans in the 1920s.

**Rhythm** -The pattern of music formed by a series of notes differing in duration and emphasis. Delta blues rhythms were created from ax song work rhythms.

**One Man Band** - When one person creates the sound of a band by playing different instruments at the same time.

**Diddley Bow** - A single string instrument created by nailing a broom wire to the side of a building and played with a slide.

**Resonator Guitar** - A metal guitar invented in 1928 by the Dopyera brothers including a resonance cone to amplify the sound. It was the loudest guitar before the invention of the electric guitar.

## **ARTIST INFORMATION**

Blues preservationist and YA Maryland Solo Artist of the Year, Curtis Blues, plays guitar, drums, harmonica and piano. He has been playing Delta blues since he was fourteen years old when he was exposed to some of the last living Delta Blues masters at folk festivals.

Curtis Blues was voted the Solo Artist of the Year for MD, VA and D.C. in 2010. He has recorded three critically acclaimed CD's and performs with the hopes of passing this musical heritage on to the next generation.

## **RESOURCES**

<http://www.pbs.org/theblues/>

*Delta Blues: The Life and Times of the Mississippi Masters Who Revolutionized American Music*, by Ted Gioia