

# Study Guide for Teachers

## **Curtis Blues** In ***Creative Upcycling!*** ***Turning Junk into Musical*** ***Instruments from Africa to*** ***America***

*Presented by*

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



### **ABOUT THE PROGRAM**

This interactive assembly challenges students to use recycled materials to make folk instruments. Using the STEM engineering design model as a guide, Curtis performs on a variety of instruments made of “up-cycled” materials. Students discuss responsible green practices and how to use discarded items to create musical instruments as people have done throughout history.

### **LEARNING GOALS**

Your students will experience how “upcycling” is the artistic side of “recycling”. Curtis will demonstrate musical instruments from all over the world are made from throw-away items.

Through his association with Young Audiences and the Teaching Artist Institute, Curtis’s perspective has been broadened on how teaching the history of acoustic blues can make earth science curriculum come alive with history, music, and language arts details. Arts-integrated teaching allows students to have a broader experience so that learning can be engaging and fun.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS**

Delta Blues is a musical form invented by African Americans in the South, particularly Mississippi, during the 1920’s -1940’s. During the great migration of African Americans from the agricultural South to the industrial jobs of the North, they brought their Delta style music with them. This music was electrified with the introduction of the electric guitar and with access to microphones starting in the 1940’s. This electrified blues music served as the basis for rock n’ roll and rap music in the decades that followed.

## **BEFORE THE PROGRAM**

Play the YouTube video “Recycled Orchestra – Cateura, Paraguay” for your students. The piece shows how beautiful music can be found anywhere, even from recycled trash from a landfill.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDQ6c\\_bLr2o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDQ6c_bLr2o)

## **VOCABULARY WORDS**

**Blues Music:** A style of popular music invented by African Americans in the 1920’s. Blues music has different variations depending on when and where it was played. It uses slurred notes and rhythms to express feelings, both happy and sad.

**Delta Blues:** Blues music from the region of the Mississippi River Delta, particularly in the state of Mississippi, during the 1920s and 1940s before it went to Chicago in the 1940s. **Chicago Blues:** A style of electric band music created in the 1940s when Delta musicians migrated to Chicago and electrified the Delta blues.

**Acoustic Music:** Music made without electric instruments (such as electric guitars and keyboards) using the natural sound of the instruments. It was most popular in rural areas before electricity was common. An example might be a person playing an acoustic guitar with another person on harmonica.

**Rhythm:** The pattern of musical movement through time. Rhythm is a specific kind of such a pattern, formed by a series of notes differing in duration and stress.

**Syncopation:** A rhythmic style often used by hip-hop artists which adds an extra beat or drops a beat in a sequence to make the rhythm more interesting.

## **AFTER THE PROGRAM**

- Ask students to infer and predict which modern instruments could be made out of some recycled materials.
- Bring Curtis Blues in for his residency “Exploring Math and Music by Making a One String Guitar” through Young Audiences or play you tube “Building musical instruments from recycled materials” part 1, 2, 3, or 4.
- Have students bring different materials from home that they feel could be used to create music – toilet paper tubes, beans, paper towels, milk bottles, rubber bands, etc.
- Have students build instruments out of what they collect.

Classroom Discussion Questions:

- How do people choose materials to build musical instruments ?
- How does a culture’s natural resources affect the choices made within that society?

## **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

