

Blues #1- Lorenzo Thomas Lecture excerpts

CONTENT AREA & GRADE LEVEL: Poetry/Literature, Upper Level High School

TIME: One Class Period

LESSON FOCUS: Students will learn about the blues as a musical and poetic form.

STANDARDS ADDRESSED:

Colorado Reading and Writing Standard 4: Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing.

As students in grades 9-12 extend their knowledge, what they know and are able to do includes:

- recognizing an author's point of view, purpose, and historical and cultural context;

STANDARDS ASSESSED:

Colorado Reading and Writing Standard 6: Students read and recognize literature as a record of human experience.

As students in grades 9-12 extend their knowledge, what they know and are able to do includes:

- reading, responding to, and discussing novels, poetry, short stories, non-fiction, content-area and technical material, plays, essays, and speeches;
- using literary terminology accurately, such as theme, mood, diction, idiom, perspective, style, and point of view;
- identifying recurrent themes in United States literature; and
- developing and supporting a thesis about the craft and significance of particular works of literature, both classic and contemporary, from a variety of ethnic writers.

ASSESSMENT: During class time, monitor students' journal writing and classroom discussion for understanding of the blues as a musical and poetic form. Assess their homework assignment (see below) for depth of description of blues poetry.

MATERIALS/BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

- Naropa Archive Lecture excerpts from Lorenzo Thomas' class lecture. (See URLs listed below 89P115 00:5:10-00:10:17; 89P115 00:31:00-00:38:55; 89P115 00:39:45-00:42:57; 89P115 01:13:16 – 01:17:00)
- *The Handbook of Poetic Forms*, ed. Ron Padgett.

Previously in this unit, students have listened to, read, and discussed several US American poets.

POSSIBLE PROCEDURES:

In class students will listen to and discuss poet Lorenzo Thomas' lecture on the blues.

1. **Do Now (5 minute period of writing in journal):** Play "Hellhound on my trail" by Robert Johnson. Students listen and free write during the song.
2. **Introduce** Lorenzo Thomas and lecture material from Naropa Institute, 1989. Play 5 minute excerpt (See URL listed below **89P115 00:5:10-00:10:17**) (blues form, blues as music, start of printed blues, 1926). Students take notes on lecture.
Audio:
http://www.naropa.edu/archive/audio/thomas_lorenzo_89p115_clip_blues_form.mp3

3. **Use the following questions as a basis for a classroom discussion:** What music and musicians influence you? Where does that music originate? What music is local? How does that music relate the particular history, society, folklore, and/or poetry of your local area? What do you already know about the blues?
4. **Play** second Thomas lecture segment (See URL listed below **89P115 00:31:00-00:38:55**). Students take notes.
Audio: http://www.naropa.edu/archive/audio/thomas_lorenzo_89p115_clip_blues_stanza.mp3
5. **Discuss:** What does Thomas mean by “A stanza is what makes the song.”? How long is a blues stanza? What is the structure of this stanza? Why can we say blues poetry is iambic? How is the blues similar to ballads or epic poems? Why is the structure of the blues stanza so important?
6. **Play** third Thomas lecture excerpt (See URL listed below **89P115 00:39:45-00:42:57**).
Audio:
http://www.naropa.edu/archive/audio/thomas_lorenzo_89p115_clip_repetition_in_blues.mp3
7. Have students take notes to answer the following questions:
Where does the stanza come from?
Why do blues poets use repetition?
What is the logic behind the repetition in the blues?
What is the audience listening for in the blues?
8. **Introduce song and play** fourth Thomas lecture excerpt starting with “Drunken Hearted Man” by Robert Johnson (See URL listed below **89P115 01:13:16 – 01:17:00**).
Audio:
http://www.naropa.edu/archive/audio/thomas_lorenzo_89p115_clip_drunken_hearted.mp3
9. Discuss as a class: What are some poetic techniques singers use in the blues?
What poetic techniques do you notice in “Hellhound on my trail”?
10. **HOMEWORK/FOLLOW UP LESSONS:** Read the “Blues” section of *The Handbook of Poetic Forms*. Write a one paragraph description of blues poetry synthesizing information from today’s class with information from the book.

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