

Appalachian Folk Music & the African Diaspora

US History

CommonGood

This curricular resource was created in collaboration with the Association for Teaching Black History in Kentucky.



Learn to be *human, humane*, and to deliberate for the *common good*.

CommonGood was founded by educators in order to provide learning resources designed for, and with, diverse communities. Our materials support inquiry-based learning and are designed to center the narratives of communities that are underrepresented in the traditional curriculum.

We believe that for students to learn to be human, humane, and to deliberate for the common good, communities need curriculum that reflects their unique character.

We work directly with communities to collaboratively construct curricular materials that facilitate stronger, more meaningful classroom dialogue. We co-create, curate, and customize learning materials with schools, and community partners.

Our work is grounded in the idea that if teachers have resources designed with their students in mind, and that invites them into co-creating learning experiences for their students, teachers will be more emboldened and effective at meeting their students' learning needs.

Together, we can create a more *humanizing pedagogy* for our students.



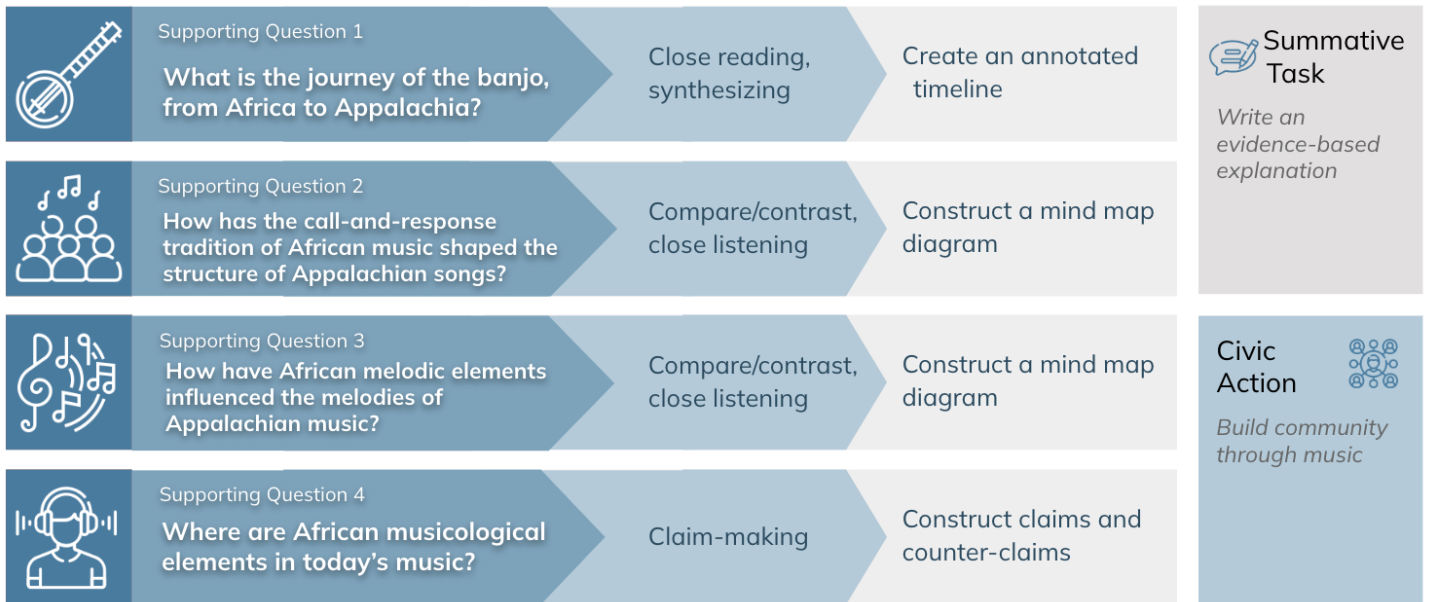
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Compelling Question: How has the African Diaspora uniquely influenced the sound and story of Appalachian music?

Students investigate the African diaspora by exploring its impact on Appalachian folk music.



Supporting Question 1: *What is the journey of the banjo, from Africa to Appalachia?*

Students explore the banjo's journey from Africa to Appalachia.

Formative Tasks	Construct an annotated timeline that details key events, cultural exchanges, and influential musicians that contributed to the banjo's evolution.	Sources: NPS, African American Southern Appalachian Music All Things Considered, Bringing The Banjo From 'Africa To Appalachia' Smithsonian Magazine, A Quest to Return the Banjo to Its African Roots
Assessment Product	Annotated timeline	

Supporting Question 2: *How has the call-and-response tradition of African music shaped the structure of Appalachian songs?*

Students analyze Appalachian folk music for its African and European song features.

Formative Tasks	Create a mind map (or similar diagram/graphic representation) that documents features of Appalachian songs related to the different styles.	Sources: Association for Teaching Black History, Early American Folk

Assessment Product Diagram / Written description

Musics: Song Forms



Supporting Question 3: *How have African melodic elements influenced the melodies of Appalachian music?*

Students identify African melodic features in Appalachian folk music.

Formative Tasks Add additional information to the diagram

Assessment Product Diagram / Written description

Sources:

Association for Teaching Black History, **Early American Folk Musics: Melodic Features**



Supporting Question 4: *Where are African musicological elements in today's music?*

Students analyze modern songs for features of African styles.

Formative Tasks Construct a series of evidence-based claims that evaluate modern songs for African musicological elements.

Assessment Product Evidence-based claim statements

Sources:

Student-curated sources



Summative Task

Students construct an evidence-based explanation that answers the compelling question: *How has the African Diaspora uniquely influenced the sound and story of Appalachian music?*

Summative Task Assessment Product Multimedia presentation

Alternative Products Written explanation (e.g., essay)



Civic Action: Community-Building

Students have the opportunity to take informed action by creating a classroom playlist that demonstrates the influence of African Diasporic musical elements.

Civic Issue Community identity and expression

Action Tasks Share playlist with school community

Sources:

Student-identified sources

Description

This inquiry module leads students through an investigation of how African Diasporic musical elements have shaped the cultural landscape of Appalachian music. By investigating the compelling question—*How has the African Diaspora uniquely influenced the sound and story of Appalachian music?*—students examine several features of the diaspora, including the journey of the banjo from its African roots to becoming a staple in Appalachian music, the influence of the call-and-response tradition on the structure of Appalachian songs, the impact of 'blue notes' and other African melodic elements on Appalachian melodies, and the tracing of African musicological elements from Appalachian traditions in today's musical genres. By completing this inquiry, students will explore the integration and evolution of instruments, melodies, and song forms from the African Diaspora within Appalachian traditions, revealing a complex tapestry of cultural transmission and adaptation.

This inquiry module reflects the civic theme of *community-building*. In the inquiry, students explore the enduring understanding that cultural traditions are dynamic and communities play an active role in preserving and evolving these traditions over time. By evaluating and taking action on the topic of African Diasporic influences in Appalachian music—considering their influence on students' own musical preferences—students gain a deeper appreciation for the cultural interplay and identity within their shared community.

Context Information

Prior to using this module/inquiry, students should have been introduced to the basic history and cultural significance of the Appalachian region. If needed, teachers can provide applicable sections from resources that cover topics such as the history of the Appalachian region, the cultural and economic development of the area, and the diverse communities that have contributed to its heritage.

Prior to using this module/inquiry, students should have had practice in applying skills such as historical analysis, musical analysis, and constructing evidence-based arguments.

Intellectual Tradition

An intellectual tradition refers to a collection of shared ideas, beliefs, knowledge, and practices that have been passed down over time within a particular academic, cultural, or philosophical community. It encompasses the foundational concepts, theories, and methodologies that shape the way people within that community think, create, and analyze information. Intellectual traditions often influence how individuals approach various disciplines and fields of study, serving as a basis for critical thinking, scholarly inquiry, and the development of new insights.

This module anchors on Black studies, specifically employing the guidance of the Black Historical Consciousness framework, developed by education scholar Lagarrett King.

See the Inquiry Collection's Intellectual Preparation Essay for more information: [Intellectual Prep Essay - Association for Teaching Black History in Kentucky collection](#).

Design Features

Below are four features that ground the designs, and design processes, of CommonGood curricular materials.

Teacher as Co-Curriculum Maker

CommonGood materials invite educators into the co-creation of learning experiences. We believe that teachers excel when given the tools and resources to exercise, and further develop, their pedagogical expertise. As such, our curricular materials are designed to intentionally cultivate teachers' content and pedagogical expertise, while not taking away their power or professional judgment.

Modularity

Materials are designed to be modular in nature, in that we expect teachers to use material to supplement their existing curriculum or combine the different modules to create a core curriculum. We define a quality curricular resource as being purposeful, authentic, adaptable, relevant, and trustworthy. To that end, these materials strive to be clear and concise, avoiding over-prescription in order for teachers to make use of materials in a way that meets their students' needs and learning goals.

Community Co-Design

We believe that for students to learn to be human, humane, and to deliberate for the common good, they need learning experiences that reflect the unique character of their respective communities. We work directly with communities to collaboratively construct curricular materials that facilitate stronger, more meaningful classroom dialogue. This curricular resource was created in collaboration with the Association for Teaching Black History, whose mission is to: "recover the social, historical, and cultural contributions of black Kentuckians and to make these materials readily available to teachers in the Commonwealth, thereby promoting quality K-12 instruction in history. The goal is to ensure an inclusive, respectful experience for all students that provides for their academic success."

Data Collection

Throughout this module, each task and sub-task presents teachers with an opportunity to gather both formal and informal data about their students' learning. The flexibility of the materials allows teachers to respond to the data in order to reinforce skills and content, provide additional scaffolds, or apply other instructional practices.

CommonGood is curious about how designs are working in classrooms. We believe that by understanding what is working, and for whom, everyone's practices improve.

As you enact this module, please share feedback here: [Feedback: Folk Music & the African Diaspora](#)

Subject Areas and Grade Bands

This module is designed for **middle or high school** classrooms, reflecting the standards alignment below.

Teachers can adapt this module for a lower grade band by making modifications that reduce the rigor of the sources and tasks.

- For sources, teachers should provide students the original full-text sources or other age-appropriate readings. Students may also be expected to curate their own sources.

Suggested Subject Areas

- This module was designed for incorporation into a **US History** or **Kentucky** history course. The inquiry module may also be adapted for incorporation into a **civics**, **geography**, or **cultural humanities** course.

Standards and Framework Alignment

This module is aligned to the following prioritized standards. Note: this list is not exhaustive, in that it does not include all standards that are aligned, or could be incorporated, into the resources.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework

Dimension 1: Developing Questions & Planning Inquiries

D1.4.9-12. Explain how supporting questions contribute to an inquiry and how, through engaging source work, new compelling and supporting questions emerge.

Dimension 2: Applying Disciplinary Concepts and Tools

D2.Geo.6.9-12. Evaluate the impact of human settlement activities on the environmental and cultural characteristics of specific places and regions.

D2.His.14.9-12. Analyze multiple and complex causes and effects of events in the past.

Dimension 3: Evaluating Sources and Using Evidence

D3.3.9-12. Identify evidence that draws information directly and substantively from multiple sources to detect inconsistencies in evidence in order to revise or strengthen claims.

D3.4.9-12. Refine claims and counterclaims attending to precision, significance, and knowledge conveyed through the claim while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both.

Dimension 4: Communicating Conclusions & Taking Informed Action

D4.2.9-12. Construct explanations using sound reasoning, correct sequence (linear or non-linear), examples, and details with significant and pertinent information and data, while acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses of the explanations given its purpose (e.g., cause and effect, chronological, procedural, technical).

Kentucky Academic Standards for Social Studies

Questioning

HS.UH.I.Q.2. Generate supporting questions to develop knowledge, understanding and/or thinking relative to key concepts in U.S. history framed by compelling questions.

HS.G.I.Q.2. Generate supporting questions to develop knowledge, understanding and thinking relative to key geographic concepts framed by compelling questions.

Investigating Using Disciplinary Concepts

HS.G.HI.2. Analyze how cultural and economic decisions influence the characteristics of various places.

HS.G.KGE.1. Explain how Kentuckians view sense of place differently based on cultural and environmental characteristics of varying regions of the state.

Using Evidence

- HS.G.I.UE.2.** Gather information and evidence from credible sources representing a variety of perspectives relevant to compelling and/or supporting questions in geography.
- HS.UH.I.UE.2.** Gather information and evidence from credible sources representing a variety of perspectives relevant to compelling and/or supporting questions in U.S. history.

Communicating Conclusions

- HS.UH.I.CC.2.** Engage in disciplinary thinking and construct arguments, explanations or public communications relevant to compelling and/or supporting questions in U.S. history.

Key Ideas & Essential Understandings

- The integration of African Diasporic musical elements into Appalachian music is a result of cultural transmission and adaptation over time.
- Instruments, melodies, and song forms from the African Diaspora have significantly influenced the development of Appalachian music.
- Understanding the influence of African Diasporic musical elements on Appalachian music provides insight into the complex tapestry of cultural interplay and identity in the region.
- Analyzing contemporary music through the lens of historical influences fosters an appreciation for the lasting impact of African musical traditions on modern genres.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to...

- **identify** musicological elements including musical instruments, melodic features, and song forms.
- **articulate** the relationships between those musicological features across time periods.
- **construct** narratives about African diaspora and impacts on popular American cultures.
- **cite** musicological features and concepts as evidence.
- **synthesize** information from various sources.

Black Historical Consciousness

This inquiry module is based upon the following theme from the Black Historical Consciousness framework by Lagarrett King (2020).

AFRICA AND THE AFRICAN DIASPORA: Africa and the African Diaspora as Black histories stress that narratives of Black people should be contextualized within the African Diaspora. A course in Black history should begin with ancient African history and connect the various Black histories around the globe.

Civic Applications

Every CommonGood module provides opportunities for students to demonstrate their transferable knowledge and skills by connecting learning to an authentic civic issue. Civic Action tasks are modeled after the C3 Framework's *Taking Informed Action* indicators, where students are expected to:

- (1) **understand** the issues evident from the inquiry in a larger and/or current context;
- (2) **assess** the relevance and impact of the issues; and
- (3) **take action** in ways that allow students to demonstrate agency in a real-world context.

This inquiry has a suggested informed action task. Teachers and students are encouraged to revise or adjust the task to reflect student interests, the topic/issue chosen for the task, time considerations, etc. Taking informed action can

manifest in a variety of forms and in a range of venues. They can be small actions (e.g., informed conversations) to the big (e.g., organizing a protest). These actions may take place in the classroom, the school, the local community, across the state, and around the world. **What's important is that students are authentically applying the inquiry to an out-of-classroom context.**

CIVIC THEME This module's Civic Action task theme is *community-building*. When students engage in community-building, they expand understanding and cooperation with others. In the inquiry, students explore the enduring understanding that cultural traditions are dynamic and communities play an active role in preserving and evolving these traditions over time. By evaluating and taking action on the influence of diverse musical elements on music, students gain a deeper appreciation for the cultural interplay and identity within their communities.

Pacing

The needed class periods to teach this module will vary depending on teachers’ decisions around enactment. The structure of the module’s different individual sections is designed to allow for teachers to condense learning into one class period or expand into multiple.

Course Sequencing

Below is a table that demonstrates an example course sequence that includes this module. The emphasis reflects a curricular sequence of inquiry modules that explore Kentucky-focused Black history, aligned to the Black Historical Consciousness framework.

State/US History Sequence

Module 1	Module 2	Module 3	Module 4	Module 5	Module 6
Black abolitionism	Horse Racing & Jim Crow	Sundown Towns	Intersectionality & Civil Rights Movement	Folk Music	Black Appalachia & “Affrilachia”

Modifications

As teachers are positioned to be co-curriculum makers, they are encouraged to adapt this inquiry module to meet the needs and interests of their students. Furthermore, teachers may decide to build out additional supporting questions and tasks to scaffold and/or reinforce learning. Below are some suggestions to consider when designing instruction.

For students who need a challenge

- **Provide graphic organizers:** Use graphic organizers to help students structure their thoughts and organize information when analyzing musical elements and historical contexts.
- **Offer guided notes:** Supply guided notes with key points and prompts to assist students in following along with the material and focusing on essential information.

For students who need supports

- **Provide Guided Notes:** Offer guided notes or graphic organizers to help students structure their analysis and keep track of key information from the sources.
- **Use Visual Aids:** Incorporate visual aids such as timelines, maps, and images to help students better understand the historical context and significance of Black jockeys in horse racing.

Compelling Question: **How has the African Diaspora uniquely influenced the sound and story of Appalachian music?**

Supporting Question 1: What is the journey of the banjo, from Africa to Appalachia?

The African Diaspora & Banjos

Supporting Question and Task

In the first supporting question—*What is the journey of the banjo, from Africa to Appalachia?*—students explore the historical and cultural path of the banjo, an instrument that symbolizes the African Diaspora's influence on Appalachian music. This introduction primes students to consider African influences, both tangible and conceptual, through the banjo's evolution, preparing them to consider musical elements in the subsequent sections.

The formative task has students describe the historical journey of the banjo from its African origins to its integration into Appalachian music. Students will create an annotated timeline that includes key events, cultural exchanges, and influential musicians that contributed to the banjo's evolution.

INQUIRY OPENER Generate questions/ideas around the term “folk music,” then compare initial ideas with an introductory video about African influences on Appalachian music.

Task Product

Construct an annotated timeline that details key events, cultural exchanges, and influential musicians that contributed to the banjo's evolution.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to...

- **describe** the historical journey of the banjo from its African origins to its integration into Appalachian music.
- **analyze** the role of African American musicians in popularizing the banjo in Appalachia.

Instructional Guidance

Teachers may enact this section using the following procedures.



1. **INQUIRY OPENING:** *Generate Questions about “folk music”*
 - Individually, in small groups, or as a class, generate questions about the term: *folk music*
 - After generating questions, engage in a discussion where students share their initial reactions to the term.
 - *Optional:* Watch some or all of one of the following videos about African Americans' impact on Appalachian music.
 - WBIR, [How African-American Appalachian music influenced the sounds of today](#)
 - [Rhiannon Giddens: On the Lost History of the Black Banjo](#)
 - Ask students: *How did this video align/conflict with generated ideas?*



2. **SOURCE ANALYSIS:** *Evidence-gathering*

- Teachers select one (or multiple) sources from the collection
- Students pull evidentiary information from the sources in order to chart the journey of the *banjo*, from Africa to modern usage in Appalachia (and beyond).
- Readings can be done individually, in groups, or as a jigsaw exercise.
 - If completed as a jigsaw, students should actively compare the information in their assigned sources, noting **corroborations**, as well as how sources collectively create a more fulsome picture of the banjo.

READING QUESTIONS Use these questions to frame discussion or as inspiration to build your own questions.

- How do different cultures blend together to create new musical traditions?
- How can music help us understand the experiences of different communities?
- What can the history of an instrument like the banjo tell us about the diversity of music?
 - What can the banjo tell us about African cultural traditions in the United States?
- How do the different sources discuss the banjo's cultural significance?



3. **ORGANIZE:** *Construct a timeline of the banjo*

- Using notes from the source reading, organize information into a chronological timeline.
 - For each event or time marker, students should include a 1-2 sentence description.

Sources

The listed sources were selected to introduce students to the African diaspora, grounded in an artifact with which many students may be familiar. Teachers should annotate, modify, excerpt, or add/subtract sources based on student interests, needs, and local relevance.

[Source 1.1](#)

(1559 words)

[National Park Service, African American Southern Appalachian Music](#) This article provides a historical overview of Black communities' impact on Southern Appalachian music, including context around the banjo. Teachers are encouraged to further divide this text to scaffold student work. (e.g., jigsaw exercise).

[Source 1.2](#)

(698 words)

[Bringing The Banjo From 'Africa To Appalachia' \(2008, October 12\). All Things Considered](#) This article—a partial transcript from the radio program All Things Considered—discusses the evolution of the banjo and influence in American musical styles.

[Source 1.3](#)

(506 words)

[Paul Ruta \(2021, February 16\). A Quest to Return the Banjo to Its African Roots.](#) In this article excerpt, the author discusses a movement to build knowledge about the history of the banjo, specifically considering its connection to Africa, enslavement, and adoption by white communities.

Additional Resources

Resource Collection: Library of Congress, “Appalachian Music.” Accessed from: <https://www.loc.gov/collections/dolly-parton-and-the-roots-of-country-music/articles-and-essays/appalachian-music/>

Compelling Question: **How has the African Diaspora uniquely influenced the sound and story of Appalachian music?**



Supporting Question 2: How has the call-and-response tradition of African music shaped the structure of Appalachian songs?

Call-and-Response vs. Strophic Songs

Supporting Question and Task

After students establish the historical journey of the banjo and its integration into Appalachian music, they build on these understandings to investigate the structural and thematic influences of African musical traditions on Appalachian songs. The second supporting question—*How has the call-and-response tradition of African music shaped the structure of Appalachian songs?*—asks students to consider the specific contributions of African call-and-response patterns to the song structures prevalent in Appalachian music. The formative task has students create a mind map diagram (or similar graphic representation) that documents features of Appalachian songs related to the different styles. Students will write a description of their mind map that identifies patterns and their origins.

Task Product

Mind map diagram

Alternative Products: written explanation

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to...

- **identify** the progression in African American music to more complex repeating elements (like choruses).
- **describe** call-and-response structures in early African American field hollers and work songs.
- **compare/contrast** early Appalachian music using strophic song forms (no repeating elements) and those that incorporate repeating elements.

Instructional Guidance

Teachers may enact this section using the following procedures.



1. **BRAINSTORM:** *Introduction to Call-and-Response*

- *The first exercise is both an initial brainstorm for students, as well as an opportunity for teachers to model this analysis.*
- Listen to a song that includes a “call-and-response” element. A well-known example is “The Banana Boat Song (Day-O)” by Harry Belafonte.
- Students write down features of the song that they notice.
 - *Is there a discernible structure? Do elements repeat? What themes are present in the lyrics?*

- *Teacher note:* though there are many elements they may notice, the goal is for students to be initially introduced to some of the elements for this section.



2. **COMPARE/CONTRAST:** *Call-and-response vs. Strophic*

- Using the provided song list, students listen to the examples.
- Students read the description in the provided source.
- During and after each song, students write down what they notice about the songs' structures.
 - Use the Discussion Questions below as a scaffold.
- Listening/notetaking can be done individually, in pairs, or in groups.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS Use these questions to frame discussion or as inspiration to build your own questions.

Call-and-Response

Structure: how do different singers engage with one another in the song?

Repeated Elements: what patterns do songs have? What repeats? What doesn't?

Audience: Based on these patterns, what does it imply about the audience (or listeners) role in the song?

Strophic

Structure: What patterns do verses follow?

Repeated Elements: What repeats? What doesn't?

Message: How does the song tell a story? How does it emphasize its message/story?



3. **CLOSE LISTENING:** *Appalachian Music Structures*

- Using their notes on call-and-response vs. strophic styles, students listen to two examples of Appalachian Folk music.
 - Individually or in small groups, students note the musical features they recognize.
- Teachers may have students do one or both songs; and, likewise, can add additional songs from the resources (provided below)



4. **ORGANIZE:** *Draft a Mind Map Diagram for Folk Music*

- Using notes from the song analysis, have students identify how the key features of the two song types show up in the Appalachian examples.
- Teachers may provide key words using the discussion question categories above as a scaffold.
- Students may also note content themes or other elements they find notable.

Sources

The listed sources provide a variety of materials to help students analyze different musicological structures. Teachers should annotate, modify, excerpt, or add/subtract sources based on student interests, needs, and local relevance.

[Source 2.1](#)

Early American Folk Musics: Song Forms This source provides an overview of different song forms, along with hyperlinks to examples.

(1096 words)

[Source 2.2](#)

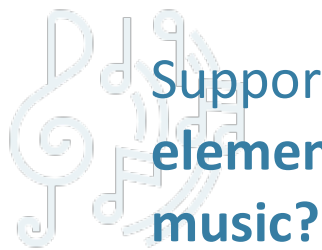
(396 words)

Optional Scaffold: Call and Response vs. Strophic This document provides additional information about the different song forms. It can be used to support teacher understanding or inform the creation of student-facing resources.

Additional Resources

Resource Collection: Berea College Sound Archives. Accessed from: <https://libraryguides.berea.edu/bsaresearchguides>.

Compelling Question: **How has the African Diaspora uniquely influenced the sound and story of Appalachian music?**



Supporting Question 3: How have African melodic elements influenced the melodies of Appalachian music?

Blue Notes and Melodic Elements

Supporting Question and Task

After students establish the influence of the call-and-response tradition on the structure of Appalachian songs, students build on these understandings to investigate the melodic influences of African musical traditions on Appalachian music. The third supporting question—*How have African melodic elements influenced the melodies of Appalachian music?*—asks students to consider the specific contributions of African melodic elements, such as 'blue notes,' to the sound of Appalachian music.

The formative task has students describe the influence of 'blue notes' and other African melodic elements on the melodies of Appalachian music. Students will add additional elements to their diagrams from the previous section, identifying patterns and their origins.

Task Product

Mind map diagram

Alternative Products: written explanation

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to...

- **identify** examples of 'blue notes' and other melodic elements in traditional African music.
- **describe** the influence of 'blue notes' and other African melodic elements on the melodies of Appalachian music.
- **compare/contrast** Appalachian songs that incorporate 'blue notes' and other African melodic elements.

Instructional Guidance

Teachers may enact this section using the following procedures.



1. BRAINSTORM: *Melodic Elements*

- Listen to two versions of the same song: one with and one without melodic embellishments.
 - *Example:* [this video from comedian Michael Jr.](#) features a high school music director singing two different versions of Amazing Grace. The first is a traditional rendition, the second has more embellishments. (Start: 1:11, End: 3:30)
- Students write down any noticings they have about the two versions, considering similarities and differences.



2. **CONNECTION-MAKING:** *Melodies (Blue Notes), Melisma / Ornamentation, & Improvisation*
- Using the provided song list, students listen to example songs that demonstrate African features of: blue notes in melodies, melisma/ornamentation, and improvisation.
 - Students read the description in the provided source.
 - During and after each song, students write down what they notice.
 - Use the Discussion Questions below as a scaffold.
 - Listening/notetaking can be done individually, in pairs, or in groups.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS Use these questions to frame discussion or as inspiration to build your own questions.

Melodies / Blue Notes

- Are there any moments where the melody includes a note that sounds 'bent' or different from the rest of the scale?
- How do the blue notes affect the overall feeling or character of the melody? Do they add a sense of tension, emotion, or expressiveness?
- What might the use of blue notes in a song tell us about the cultural or emotional context from which the music originates?

Melisma / Ornamentation

- Where is a single syllable of text sung across several different notes?
- How does this feature contribute to the song's expression?
- What role does ornamentation play in the song? How does it highlight particular words or emotions?
- How does the use of melisma or ornamentation in this song compare to its use in other genres you are familiar with?

Improvisation

- Can you hear any parts of the song that sound spontaneous or like they might not be exactly the same every time the song is played?
- How does improvisation contribute to the musician's personal expression within the song?



3. **CLOSE LISTENING:** *Appalachian Melodic elements*
- Using their notes on melodic elements, students listen to the same two examples of Appalachian Folk music from the previous section.
 - Individually or in small groups, students note the musical features they recognize.
 - Teachers may have students do one or both songs; and, likewise, can add additional songs from the resources (provided in the previous section).



4. **EXERCISE TYPE:** *Build out the Mind Map Diagram*
- Using notes from this section, students add additional elements/features to their mind map from the previous section.
 - Teachers may provide key words using the discussion question categories above as a scaffold.

Sources

The listed sources were selected to help further students' analysis into the African diasporic influence of music by considering melodic elements. Teachers should annotate, modify, excerpt, or add/subtract sources based on student interests, needs, and local relevance.

[Source 3.1](#)

(1087 words)

Early American Folk Musics: Melodic Features This source provides an overview of different melodic features, along with hyperlinks to examples.

[Source 3.2](#)

(492 words)

Optional Scaffold: African Melodies and Blue Notes This document provides additional information about different melodic features. It can be used to support teacher understanding or inform the creation of student-facing resources.

Compelling Question: **How has the African Diaspora uniquely influenced the sound and story of Appalachian music?**



Supporting Question 4: Where are African musicological elements in today's music?

African Diasporic Appalachia Across Modern Music

Supporting Question and Task

After students establish the influence of 'blue notes' and other African melodic elements on the melodies of Appalachian music, they build on these understandings to investigate the continuity and evolution of African musicological elements in contemporary music. The fourth supporting question—*Where are African musicological elements in today's music?*—asks students to consider the ongoing impact and presence of African musical traditions in modern music genres.

The formative task has students construct a series of evidence-based claims that evaluate modern songs for African musicological elements. Students will analyze and compare specific examples of contemporary music that incorporate African musicological elements originating from Appalachian traditions, identifying patterns and their origins.

Task Product

Evidence-based claim statements

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to...

- **identify** contemporary songs or genres that incorporate African musicological elements from Appalachian traditions.
- **analyze** the similarities and differences between African musicological elements in traditional Appalachian music and those found in contemporary music.
- **construct** evidence-based claims about African musicological elements' presence in songs.

Instructional Guidance

Teachers may enact this section using the following procedures.



1. **DISCUSSION:** *What musical genres do you like?*
 - Prior to this class period—or on the spot—teachers should ask students to share songs that they enjoy listening to, whether they are currently popular or not.
 - If time allows, gather data of student genre preferences and create a chart showing the breakdown.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS Use these questions to frame discussion or as inspiration to build your own questions.

- What genres of music do you prefer listening to?
- Why do you enjoy it?
- What emotions does it cause you to feel?
- Have you noticed any of the elements we've previously discussed showing up in songs you listen to?



2. **SONG ANALYSIS:** *African features in Popular Music*

- Individually or in small groups, students listen to a song (or songs) of their choosing, identifying the extent to which African musicological elements are present.
- Notes can be organized into a list format.

BE SCHOOL APPROPRIATE Remind students that for this exercise, they must use songs whose content is appropriate for a school setting (or an edited version).



3. **CLAIM-MAKING:** *Collaboratively build a collection of evidence-based claims.*

- Using sources from across the inquiry module, create multiple inference- and evidence-based claim statements about the African influence on the song(s).
- After creating a collection of claims, individually or in groups, prioritize the claims by ranking the claims (or selecting their top 3-4 claims) according to how strong they believe the claim and evidence are.
 - For the top three claims, write why they think it is a strong claim and evidence pairing.
 - This justification should connect directly back to the claim/evidence, but also allows students to express a subjective opinion.



Compelling Question: How has the African Diaspora uniquely influenced the sound and story of Appalachian music?

Construct an Evidence-based Explanation

Compelling Question and Task

Throughout the inquiry, students examined the African diaspora by considering musicological elements' impact on American music styles, specifically Appalachian folk music. In the Summative Task, students communicate their knowledge, apply disciplinary skills, and construct evidence-based claims using multiple sources to create an explanation responding to the compelling question: *How has the African Diaspora uniquely influenced the sound and story of Appalachian music?*

Task Product

Students create a multimedia presentation that explores the influence of African Diasporic musical elements on Appalachian music, including audio clips, images, and a narrative.

Potential Responses

Students' explanations should reflect a range of possible responses, including one or more of the following:

- *African Diasporic music in Appalachia has introduced specific rhythmic patterns and instrumental techniques that are now hallmarks of the region's music.*
- *The unique sound of Appalachian music is a result of the fusion of African Diasporic elements with local Appalachian traditions, creating a distinct musical genre.*
- *African American musicians in Appalachia have played a pivotal role in the development of the region's music, influencing genres beyond Appalachia and contributing to the broader American music landscape.*

Civic Action: How do these elements show up in songs that represent our community?

Apply Learning to a New Context through Informed Civic Action

Students have the opportunity to take informed action by considering how the African musicological elements they learned throughout the inquiry show up in songs that hold meaning for them.

Civic Theme: *Community-Building*

This module's Civic Action task theme is *community-building*. In the inquiry, students explore the enduring understanding that cultural traditions are dynamic and communities play an active role in preserving and evolving these traditions over time. By evaluating and taking action on the influence of African musical elements on students' musical preferences, students gain a deeper appreciation for the cultural interplay and identity within their communities.

Understand

Completed in the inquiry's Supporting Question 4: Understand several elements of the African musical tradition

Assess

Identify and analyze a song of choice, considering how African musical traditions are represented in the song, identifying patterns and their origins. Describe why the song is of significance to you.

Take Action

Create a classroom playlist that demonstrates the influence of African Diasporic musical elements. The playlist should draw upon individuals' experiences, telling a collective story of the learning community. Accompany the playlist with curator's notes for each selection, explaining the cultural significance and musical connections to both historical and contemporary contexts.

Supporting Question 1 Sources

Source 1.1

National Park Service (n.d.) African American Southern Appalachian Music.

This article provides a historical overview of Black communities' impact on Southern Appalachian music, including context around the banjo. This article can be used as an overall context document or in support of Supporting Question 1.

Public Domain. Available at: [African American Southern Appalachian Music](#).

Southern Appalachian mountain music has transcended time and location, standing as a root to many music genres, such as the blues, jazz, bluegrass, country, gospel, and American folk. It is a fusion of culture that has crossed borders of geography, race, and class, reminding us that music is just as mobile as the people are who create it and listen to it. Beginning with a narrative of forced migration and slavery, the musical practices of African Americans have significantly contributed to the Southern Appalachian musical sound that is heard in the Great Smoky Mountains and surrounding areas. The African American Experience Project is highlighting this crucial, but often overlooked, African American cultural contribution while also emphasizing the historical presence of African Americans in the region.

Memory, Instruments, and Slavery (16th -19th centuries)

African American culture, including its musical practices, began on slave ships where diverse West African ethnicities and sounds were forced to collide in order to survive. Various songs, languages, and cultures traveled within the memories of captured Africans as their chained bodies were transported as cargo across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas. On this violent journey, the captives were sometimes brought up from the confined storage spaces of the ship and were required to dance and sing for exercise on the ship's deck so that they would be healthy for profit on American slave markets. This led to the development of cultural kinships, as languages, music, dance practices, and religious beliefs were shared amongst the captives. Once they arrived on American shores, enslaved Africans used the various cultural practices of their homelands to create a new and vibrant African American culture that was born in bondage. They went on to create and contribute to so much of what is considered American culture and music, including Southern Appalachian mountain music. Within the memories of captured Africans there also traveled the sound and construction of over sixty long necked West African gourd instruments, such as the ankonting, ngoni, and xalam to name a few. Gourds are oddly shaped fruits with thick shells that are used as the body of these instruments. The gourd instruments later evolved into what is now the banjo. Enslaved Africans' distinct style of down stroke banjo picking, which is known as "clawhammer", was popularized on plantations and established the unique Southern Appalachian banjo sound that is heard today.

Also known as the bowed lute, the fiddle traveled across the Atlantic within the memories of captured Africans as well. While the fiddle historically has multiple cultural meanings and origins in many civilizations around the globe, African Americans' style of fiddling is reflective of centuries old West African fiddling techniques. Those techniques went on to heavily influence the traditional Southern Appalachian fiddling style. Jim Spencer was a formerly enslaved African American man who this fiddling tradition lived on through, as the old-time musician Hobart Smith recalled hearing Spencer play the fiddle when Smith was a young boy in the early 1900s in Sugar Grove, NC. Enslaved Africans used their music to practice religion, tell stories, and to communicate paths to freedom. Using their bodies as instruments, they would 'pat juba', a dance practiced by enslaved Africans that involved the hands patting the body to provide a drum like quality or beat to musical ensembles. "'Pattin' juba'" was popularized when it became illegal for the enslaved to play drums, as whites feared that they would use drums to communicate with one another in order to make plans of escape

or rebellion. This concept of the dancing body as an instrument remains in Southern Appalachia today and is practiced by individuals like Arthur Grimes of Boone, NC, an African American clog dancer who uses his tapping feet to perform with musical ensembles. Clogging is also a dance practice that has African roots, as well as Native American, and European roots, and it is traditional in the Great Smoky Mountain region.

With fast down stroking fingers, dust kicking feet, and soft scratching fiddling, enslaved African musicians created tunes that became a standard musical sound across the Antebellum South. They were often required to perform to entertain whites on plantations and would also be sent by their owners to travel to other plantations or social events as entertainment, further spreading musical Africanisms across the American South. Due to the mountainous terrains and weather conditions, slavery was less widespread in the southern mountains than in the Deep South because the environment was not suitable for profitable crops. However, slavery was still very present in the Southern Appalachian Mountains. This resulted in closer interactions between whites and Blacks in areas like the Great Smokies. While there was still a societal racial imbalance, these close interactions created the rich intercultural nature of Southern Appalachian music which combined African, European, and Native American musical practices.

Post-Civil War and the Great Migration (late 19th – mid 20th century)

Minstrel shows became extremely popular nationally and globally during the post-Civil War era of the late 19th century. Minstrelsy was a form of theatrical entertainment that portrayed racist stereotypes of African Americans that were rooted in the history of slavery. White actors would apply black colored makeup to their faces and red paste on and around their mouths to create large, exaggerated lips to mock African features. This is called ‘black face’, a clown like mask used to negatively portray African Americans as they were seen in the eye of white society.

Minstrel shows globalized African American musical styles and techniques, as the banjo and fiddle were incorporated into the acts to further characterize dehumanizing caricatures of blackness. Although slavery was abolished in 1865, the entertainment industry and the country at large were highly discriminatory. If African Americans were able to find paid work as performers during this time, many were often required to portray degrading characters and even perform in black face themselves.

The Southern Black Appalachian music sound also expanded in sound, popularity, and region during the late 19th to mid 20th centuries largely due to the railroad industry which brought many jobs to Southern Appalachia. Thus, African American men and their families migrated from the Deep South to Appalachia to work on the railroads, bringing their own cultures and musical styles with them. Over the clanks of metal tools against the unfinished railroads, perhaps some would hum the tune of songs like “Railway Bill” or “Smokey Blues”, with sounds of banjo picking and down-home fiddling playing in the backs of their minds. Dave Thompson, a Black banjo player from Ashe County, NC, traveled to Tennessee and Kentucky as a railroad worker, and possibly inspired the famous white Southern Appalachian musician Tom Ashley’s sound.

Southern Appalachian mountain music steadily grew in national popularity in the early to mid-20th century. However, many recording labels characterized southern mountain and ‘old-time’ music with white hillbilly and country music singers, rejecting its Black pioneers. This racialization led to the region’s music being solely linked to southern whiteness. As a result, African American musicians like Lesley Riddle of Burnsville, NC, fell into the backdrop of Southern Appalachian music, working with the famous white folk music group The Carter Family behind the scenes. Fortunately, there are recordings of African American musicians like Leola Manning, Odessa Cansler, and the Tennessee Chocolate Drops from the 1929 and 1930 St. James Sessions in Knoxville, TN where the musicians recorded gospel, blues, old-time, and pop records. Each of these genres have Black Southern Appalachian roots, mountain songs were even originally called “blues” in the 20th century and they took on African American musical sounds and practices.

The Great Migration (1915-1970) was a period when millions of African Americans left southern rural areas and

migrated to more urban or northern locations. They fled to escape racism and to seek better employment and educational opportunities. As a result, many eventually lost their personal connections to Southern Appalachian music. With the desire to reshape their narratives and separate themselves from racist stereotypes, many African Americans left instruments like the banjo and fiddle behind due to their popularized demeaning imagery in minstrel shows. Many African American musicians migrated North during the 1940s and 1950s. At this time Black musicians were creating mostly jazz, blues, and gospel records that were more accepted from them by the record industry, while also creating music that they felt was more positively reflective of Black life and culture.

Mobility is a key trait of the African American experience. From the slave ship, to the railroads, and to the Great Migration, music that has derived from this history has traveled and evolved along with its creators. Even though many 20th century African American musicians left Southern Appalachian music in the past, its sound, soul, and storytelling techniques still lingered in their music, and it continues to linger on American music genres.

There are some African American musicians who keep the Southern Appalachian style alive today at folk festivals and Black banjo gatherings. The former band The Carolina Chocolate Drops are largely responsible for reviving Southern Appalachian music within the African American community. Its former members, Rhiannon Giddens and Dom Flemons among others, continue to keep the genre alive today. Through the ancestral memory of musical Africanisms that were brought to Southern Appalachia, African Americans have created distinctly inescapable musical styles that have contributed so much to what is commonly understood today as Southern Appalachian mountain music.

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Source 1.2

Bringing The Banjo From 'Africa To Appalachia' (2008, October 12). All Things Considered, NPR.

This article—a partial transcript from the radio program All Things Considered—discusses the evolution of the banjo and influence in American musical styles.

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While typically associated with traditional bluegrass, country and even jazz, the banjo has roots that stretch all the way back to West Africa. Musician Jayme Stone made that journey in search of the ancestors of his own banjo. Along the way, he met kora player Mansa Sissoko. The two have collaborated on a new album called *Africa to Appalachia*, and recently spoke about their musical partnership from the studios of Minnesota Public Radio in St. Paul.

Originally, the banjo traveled across the ocean on slave ships coming from West Africa in the 1600s and 1700s. The instrument was "later passed off to curious 'white folk' like me," Stone says. "Although a few people play some of the crossover styles that happened early on in the new world, [it] didn't seem like there was much knowledge of the music that it came from."

The Banjo's Evolution

Naturally, at that time, the instrument was not the modern-day banjo that most people recognize. Instead, it was more of an early incarnation that evolved over time.

"It's hard to say exactly what it was," Stone says. "More than anything, it was the blueprint of the banjo that traveled over in musicians' minds, and then they built a similar thing with what they had here: dried-out gourds, goat skin, whatever they could find. The instrument changed, and with the advent of metal, it became an African instrument that went through the Industrial Revolution."

The banjo in its current form has frets and employs a short droning string — what banjo players call the fifth string. But in Africa, these early predecessors sometimes used only one string and as many as 21. They have all kinds of names, depending on the region and dialect the people are speaking. Most common are the ngoni, which can have anywhere from three to nine strings; the two-stringed konou; and the one-stringed juru keleni, all found in various parts of Mali. Stone says that Senegal has instruments that are even closer in relation to the modern banjo — especially the akonting.

Sissoko specializes in the kora, a 21-string West African harp made from a calabash — a dried-out gourd also used to play percussion, as well as carry fruits and vegetables from the markets. Stemming out from the calabash, the kora has a long pole with leather straps tied to it that hold the 21 strings, which are made from fishing line. Despite the evolution of the instrument's physical aspects, when played side by side, the banjo and the kora have a very similar sonic quality.

Musical Similarities

"The sound of the notes are complementary," Stone says. "You have this nylon against metal, but in some ways the playing style and the melodic sensibility is quite similar."

Some sounds and ancestral melodic relics of the banjo's older predecessors still survive in American banjo music.

"There are traces of all kinds of things," Stone says. "If you listen to what they call minstrel music — which was this first white adaptation of African music that was mixed with English ballads and Irish fiddle tunes and some European classical-music influences — this was the style that was popular at the turn of the last century. In that music, you can hear these little repeated phrases, and then they would change and move on to something else. Whereas in West African music, they would take these repeated phrases and they would stack on all these other phrases."

"In certain ways," he adds, "Malian music is like LEGOs: You have one thing, and you can kind of stack on another thing and another thing endlessly. All these different people bring in different melodies and rhythms, and it's what they call polyrhythm."

Stone says the versatility and flexibility of the banjo and its African ancestors attracted him to the instrument and makes it distinctive.

"Let's just face it: It's the hippest instrument, at least in my world," Stone says. "It's kind of quirky, but it's really adaptable. You can be supportive with it, it's a rhythmic instrument, you can play melodically, you can play all kinds of different things. More than anything, it's the player and the imagination, but I think the instrument is capable of playing anything."

Source 1.3

Paul Ruta (2021, February 16). A Quest to Return the Banjo to Its African Roots. *Smithsonian Magazine*

In this article excerpt, the author discusses a movement to build knowledge about the history of the banjo, specifically considering its connection to Africa, enslavement, and adoption by white communities.

Reprinted within fair use. Available at: [Black Musicians' Quest to Return the Banjo to Its African Roots](#).

[...] The average American, if asked to conjure an image of a banjo, would likely picture the modern version of the instrument. It would be a factory-made object with a round wooden or metal body, with a synthetic, drum-like membrane stretched taut across the body, and four or five metal strings spanning a fretted neck.

In other words, people would tend to picture the good old bluegrass banjo, or the kind of instrument made popular by Pete Seeger and other singers and folklorists of the sixties. Either way, the context is almost always White, because for hundreds of years the story of the banjo has been told from an exclusively White point of view.

The familiar bluegrass-style banjo is indeed a twentieth-century American creation, a defining characteristic of the bluegrass and country music which evolved along with it. But the modern banjo, according to Mayree, is a demonstration of how far it has become separated from its roots. In fact, she calls it “part of the colonization of the instrument.” [...]

The story of the banjo goes back centuries, to West Africa, where folk lute instruments like the Senegambian akonting have long been in use. In recent decades, scholars and master musicians such as Daniel Laemouahuma Jatta have kept alive the traditions of these instruments, which ethnomusicologists worldwide are finally recognizing as living ancestors of the banjo.

Those African instruments never made the journey on slave ships bound for the Americas, but the technology for building them was carried in the heads of the passengers along with their memories of the music.

Enslaved Africans then fashioned variations on those instruments in the fields of the Mississippi Delta and elsewhere. Thus began the banjo’s trail of evolution in America.

In the mid-1800s, minstrel shows were a popular form of entertainment, where White performers in blackface played banjos and sang and danced in a caricature of Black music and culture.

Owning a banjo (or an equally popular fiddle) soon became all the rage in households across the country. To meet demand, production became mechanized, and the banjo quickly lost all connection to the earth. Along the way, its connection to Black heritage was effectively erased.

By the early twentieth century, the mass-produced banjo had become a symbol of White supremacist culture—so much so that in later decades people sometimes had difficulty accepting the fact of its African origins.

“Correcting the history of the banjo and making it clear that this instrument, so central to American cultural history that so many White people have their personal identities wrapped up in, is in fact African American, forces a shift in understanding the country’s history as well as personal cultural identifications,” Ross claimed.

No one is suggesting that the banjo and its means of manufacture, along with the music played on it, ought to be immune to evolution and adaptation. All musical instruments are subject to change....The difference is one of cultural ownership and general acknowledgement, of giving credit where it’s due—especially when credit is long overdue to a historically oppressed people. [...]

Supporting Question 2 Sources

Source 2.1

Early American Folk Musics: Song Forms

Written for the Association for Teaching Black History in Kentucky, 2024.

Introduction

Early American song forms, especially those that predated any recording technology, closely reflected the musical forms that people brought with them from outside of the Americas. People that arrived from Europe brought musical ideas and patterns with them, and those typified the kinds of music that they made in their communities for some generations in the Americas. The same is true for Africans who were enslaved and brought to the Americas. The musics that they made within their communities reflected patterns that were (and in many cases still are) common to African musics.

There were stark contrasts between the song forms used by Americans that came from Africa and those that came from Europe. The most common song form to those coming from Europe was strophic songs. These songs featured a single melody which repeated, each time with different lyrics, which would often tell a story. The most common song form to those coming from Africa were ‘call and response’ songs. These featured an interplay between a lead vocalist who would improvise both melodies and lyrics, and a group that would sing a response, which had a repeating melody and lyrics.

Over time these song forms grew together and mixed to create song forms which are still popular today. To fully appreciate the contributions of different musical traditions, it is helpful to examine early examples of each, and ways they influenced each other over time.

Call and Response

Some of the earliest African American musics were focused on groups of people being able to sing together, and without instruments. These featured a lead vocalist who would improvise and interpret lyrics and melodies, followed by a group singing back a line with lyrics and melodies that would repeat. This allowed for a large group of people to sing together (with responses that could be easily memorized), while also not getting bored (because of the element of improvisation).

These songs are often called ‘field hollers’ or ‘work songs’ as people who were working outside together could sing them to pass time and stay socially and intellectually engaged through extremely repetitive tasks.

Example 1: “Work Song,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4MwQcm4eH18>

This song was recorded in 1966. Unlike some examples, this is likely a recording of performers singing a song that exemplified the earliest call and response forms (1800’s - early 1900’s). Notice that the leader varies the lyrics and melody (somewhat), but the response never changes.

Example 2: “Rosie and Levee Camp Holler,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fjv0MYIFYsg>

This song was recorded in 1947. This is a ‘field recording’ which means that a musicologist (Alan Lomax in this case) recording people in communities singing or playing the music that they would in their everyday lives. Notice that while the call and response form is still clear, the lead part is sometimes sung by more than one person, and the response is more varied and complex.

Example 3: Lead Belly, “Pick a Bale of Cotton,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pd5ViH_5598

This song was recorded in 1941. This was part of a collection or album recorded in a studio for a commercial release. Notice the call and response song form is further complicated, including vocalists adding harmony and instrumental accompaniment.

Strophic Songs

The musics typical to European immigrants, particularly those coming from the British Isles (England, Scotland, Ireland) often used strophic song forms. Strophic songs feature a single melody that repeats with different lyrics each time. In modern terms, this would be like songs made up of only verses, never a chorus. It was common for popular strophic songs to be sung in bars or public houses (in informal settings), and for the melodies of those songs to have religious lyrics set to them for use in church (more formal settings). These are often now called hymns, and because of their use in formal settings like church are very well preserved. It is important to note that hymns and religious music were mimicking common, popular song forms from European and immigrant communities.

Example 1: “Amazing Grace,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rznMff1Ljz8>

This is the earliest known recording (1922) of a very well known song. Originally titled ‘New Britain’, the song is now known by another name, and featured religious lyrics set to a popular melody in 1779. The song follows the strophic form and features complex vocal harmony (3 or 4 complementary melodies being sung simultaneously) which was typical to the style.

Example 2: Alan Lomax, “Barbara Allen,” <https://wgvu.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/lomax-collection-song-2/barbara-allen-americas-songs-the-alan-lomax-collection/>

This song was recorded between 1933 and 1947. This is another field recording made by Alan Lomax. The song is a traditional Scottish ballad, sung by a woman in Kentucky, demonstrating both the European origins of the strophic form and their persistent use and popularity amongst European immigrants in the US.

Example 3: “The Erie Canal Song,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ep1hi6VBaWg>

This song was recorded in 1913. This song was written by an American song writer drawing on the strophic style, but there are signs of movement towards use of repeating elements. Verses repeat with varied lyrics. There is a ‘chorus’ in that there’s a new melody responding to the verse section, but the lyrics vary in each chorus.

Early Appalachian Songs

As African Americans and European Americans were exposed to one another their musics influenced the other. Elements of song forms from African American Traditions began to influence music created by European Americans and vice versa. Songs written and performed by African American recording artists began to feature repeating, verse-like elements with a story-telling function like strophic songs. Songs written and performed by European Americans began to utilize repeating elements, which came to be known as a ‘chorus’.

Example 1: The Jubalaires, “Noah,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wx0oU1OnHf8>

This song was recorded in 1946. Please notice a recurring chorus sung by the entire group, with verses sung by an individual. In this particular case there's a portion of the verse that is sung, and one that is spoken, the spoken portion serving a storytelling function.

Example 2: Pete Seeger, Jean Ritchie, and Bernice Reagon, “Rainbow Quest,”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XaNHd371py8> (START AT TIMESTAMP 9:30)

This song was recorded in 1966. This solo performer accompanies herself with a folk instrument (called a mountain

dulcimer). The song features both a repeating chorus and verses with varied lyrics. While recorded more recently, the song and song form would have been typical of Appalachian musics from the turn of the century.

Additional Songs can be accessed from the [Berea Sound Archives](#).

Source 2.2

Optional Resource: Call and Response vs. Strophic

Written for the Association for Teaching Black History in Kentucky, 2024.

Call-and-Response Songs

- **Structure:** Identify the parts of the song where the leader sings a line (the "call") and the group responds.
 - *Example:* In traditional African-American work songs, one person sings a line, and the group echoes or responds.
- **Repetition:** Notice how the response is often repeated, creating a pattern throughout the song.
 - *Example:* "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" has a repeated chorus that responds to the verses.
- **Interaction:** Pay attention to how the call and response interact. Does the response complete the call, or does it contrast with it?
 - *Example:* In gospel songs, the congregation's response may echo the preacher's call or add harmonies.
- **Purpose:** Consider the purpose of the call-and-response format. Is it to encourage participation, emphasize certain lyrics, or create a sense of community?
 - *Example:* In "The Banana Boat Song (Day-O)," the call-and-response format helps workers stay in rhythm while working.

Strophic Songs

- **Verse Structure:** Identify how each verse has the same melody but different lyrics.
 - *Example:* "Amazing Grace" has multiple verses with the same melody but different words.
- **Repetition:** Notice the repeated melody in each verse, which creates a familiar pattern.
 - *Example:* "Blowin' in the Wind" by Bob Dylan uses the same melody for each verse, making the song easy to follow.
- **Narrative Progression:** Pay attention to how the story or message unfolds through the different verses.
 - *Example:* In "The Times They Are A-Changin'" by Bob Dylan, each verse contributes to the overall message of change and progress.
- **Chorus (if present):** Look for a repeated chorus that may appear after each verse, reinforcing the main theme.
 - *Example:* "This Land Is Your Land" by Woody Guthrie has a repeated chorus that emphasizes the song's message.

General Elements to Observe

- **Lyrics:** Focus on the lyrics and how they convey the song's message or story.
 - *Example:* In folk songs, lyrics often tell a story or convey a moral lesson.
- **Melody:** Listen to the melody and notice how it changes or stays the same.
 - *Example:* In strophic songs, the melody typically stays the same for each verse.
- **Rhythm and Beat:** Pay attention to the rhythm and beat, especially in call-and-response songs, where the rhythm can drive the interaction.
 - *Example:* In work songs, the beat helps synchronize the group's efforts.
- **Emotional Tone:** Consider the emotional tone of the song and how it is conveyed through the music and lyrics.
 - *Example:* Gospel songs often have an uplifting and spiritual tone.

Supporting Question 3 Sources

Source 3.1

Early American Folk Musics: Melodic Features

Written for the Association for Teaching Black History in Kentucky, 2024.

Melodies

African and European American musics have distinct melodic features, both relating to how melodies are written and also how they are performed.

African American musics were written using scales typical of African musics. There's a very good (and brief) explanation of these scales and their origins below (in additional materials). When melodies were written using these scales, 'blue notes' would show up regardless of the performer.

Example 1: "Wade in the Water," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QwkWSAJZmlw>

This is a contemporary recording of an old and well known song from a genre known as spirituals. Please note the melody in the opening section, which is composed using a pentatonic scale and leans heavily on the 'blue notes' in that scale. While the vocalist used embellishments, the melody of the song itself will not vary significantly when performed by others, and will preserve the use of blue notes.

Example 2: "What Wondrous Love is This," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qi2WQTu3GM>

This is a contemporary recording of an old song from a genre known as American Folk Hymns. This recording features the hammer dulcimer, which is an instrument with roots in Appalachia. Please notice the use of blue notes in the melody, most notably in the first section where there is little accompaniment. Songs like these were written by religious communities at a time when European and African derived musics were mixing.

Melisma / Ornamentation

African American musics were performed using two techniques typical of African musics. Those include melisma and improvisation. Melisma takes a note from the melody and adds a quick flurry of notes to it. One of the better places to observe melisma being used is at the end of a phrase or melodic line. By contrast, it would be uncommon for a singer in European derived musics to do so. Singers in those contexts would get the end of a phrase and hold the last note, take a breath before singing the next phrase.

These and other elements of ornamentation are sometimes described as adding 'feeling' or 'soul' to a performance. This would suggest that performers that do not add ornamentation might be less emotionally connected to their musical expression. A musicologists' perspective on this would be that musicians from different traditions interpret music how they were taught to, and in connection with their tradition. This would suggest that a musician making good use of ornamentation and melisma is honoring their musical heritage well, but that does imply anything specifically about their level of 'feeling.'

Example 1: Mahalia Jackson, "How I Got Over," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l49N8U3d0Bw>

This recording is of Mahalia Jackson performing a popular gospel song at a religious celebration. Please notice the use of melisma at the end of each phrase. Ms. Jackson seldom holds the last note, but will instead add 3-4 notes as a melodic flourish. These are not part of the written melody, but her performance. The use of melisma changes at the end of every phrase (and likely would be different performance to performance). They are an element of her performance, not the

way the song itself was written.

Example 2: Collection of Mountain Songs, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5tFpxozotPE>

This is a field recording of musicians in a local community coming together to play and sing. Please notice that there is no use of melisma in their performance. The vocalists arrive at the end of each phrase and hold the last note. There is a brief pause before they sing the next line. This is true of their performance and also typical of European derived musics.

Example 3: “Man of Constant Sorrows,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHamgwIQ1yo>

This is a contemporary recording in a traditional style typical of Appalachian music during the period with European and African musics were actively mixing. Please notice the vocalists use of melisma at the end of phrases, as well as some blue notes in the composed melody.

Improvisation

A key feature of African derived musics all over the world, and certainly in the Americas is the prominence of improvisation. In discussion of the call and response song form it was noted that a lead singer may improvise between fixed responses by a group. This musical feature grew in prominence and complexity over time, allowing for more freedom for improvisation outside of the call and response format, where vocalists might improvise in various places throughout the song.

Example 1: The Five Blind Boys of Alabama, “Look Where He Brought Me From,”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEHiiRWb3Qs>

This is a recording of a live performance of a traditional song in the gospel tradition. This is an example of an extension of the call and response song form with expansive improvisation. Notice that the lead vocalist changes (takes turns with another), that the response remains the same and is quite short. The improvisation goes in a number of directions melodically, lyrically, and no longer seems to be directing the response.

Example 2: The Dixie Hummingbirds, “The Little Wooden Church,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ObnbtSqJYc0>

This is a recording of a performance for live broadcast of a song in the gospel tradition. This example demonstrates the ways that the role of the lead vocalist evolves. Where the lead vocalist seems to be directing the response of the group in the first sections, it becomes clear in the latter sections that the groups’ parts are fixed and provide structure for the leader to improvise. It’s not difficult to imagine that performance to performance, what is sung by the group will remain largely unchanged, while the leaders’ performance could vary significantly.

Example 3: Fred Hammond, “Total Praise,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFNkCeQE-xw>

This is a live performance of a contemporary and popular gospel song. Please notice in the early sections of this recording that the leader sings the melody, followed by sections where the group sings the melody and the leader improvises freely. The leader sometimes introduces a phrase that the group is about to sing, other times develops a melodic or lyrical phrase while the group carries the melody.

Additional Materials

Blue Notes (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4HCA9EzzfY8>): This video explains ways that scales typical of African musics (5 and 6 note scales) were used alongside and eventually incorporated into Western European (8 note) scales. The combination and their use eventually became known as ‘blue notes’ as characteristic of African American musics in a variety of forms.

Source 3.2

Optional Resource: African Melodies and Blue Notes

Written for the Association for Teaching Black History in Kentucky, 2024.

African Melodies and Blue Notes

- **Rhythmic Complexity:** Notice the complex rhythms and syncopation that are characteristic of African music.
 - *Example:* West African drumming patterns feature interlocking rhythms and polyrhythms.
- **Call-and-Response:** Identify instances of call-and-response within the melodies.
 - *Example:* In African folk songs, a soloist might sing a line followed by a choral response.
- **Blue Notes:** Pay attention to the use of blue notes—notes that are sung or played at a slightly lower pitch than the standard major scale for expressive purposes.
 - *Example:* Blues music, influenced by African musical traditions, often features blue notes, particularly in the third, fifth, and seventh degrees of the scale.

Melisma and Ornamentation

- **Melisma:** Identify sections where a single syllable is stretched over several notes, creating a smooth, flowing melodic line.
 - *Example:* In gospel music, singers often use melisma to add emotional expression to their performance.
- **Ornamentation:** Look for additional notes that embellish the main melody, such as trills, turns, and grace notes.
 - *Example:* Baroque music, such as Handel's "Messiah," features ornamentation to enhance the melodic line.
- **Vocal Runs:** Notice the rapid series of notes sung on a single syllable, often found in R&B and pop music.
 - *Example:* Mariah Carey and Whitney Houston are known for their use of vocal runs and melisma in their songs.

Improvisation

- **Spontaneity:** Listen for sections where the performer deviates from the written or expected melody to create something new on the spot.
 - *Example:* Jazz solos, where musicians improvise melodies over a set chord progression, demonstrate improvisation.
- **Interaction:** Pay attention to how musicians interact with each other during improvisation, responding to each other's musical ideas.
 - *Example:* In jazz ensembles, the soloist might interact with the rhythm section, creating a dynamic musical conversation.
- **Variation:** Notice how the performer varies the melody, rhythm, or harmony during improvisation.
 - *Example:* In Indian classical music, performers often improvise within the framework of a raga, adding their own interpretations and embellishments.
- **Expression:** Consider how improvisation allows the performer to express their individuality and emotions.
 - *Example:* In blues music, guitar solos often convey the player's personal expression and emotional depth through improvised licks and riffs.

General Elements to Observe

- **Rhythm:** Focus on the rhythm and how it drives the music, especially in African melodies and improvisational pieces.
 - *Example:* In African drumming, rhythm is central and often very complex.

- **Melody:** Listen to the melody and how it is shaped by blue notes, melisma, and ornamentation.
 - *Example:* Blues melodies often feature blue notes that give the music its distinctive sound.
- **Harmony:** Pay attention to the harmonic context in which improvisation and ornamentation occur.
 - *Example:* In jazz, the harmonic progression provides the framework for improvisation.
- **Emotional Expression:** Consider how these musical elements contribute to the emotional impact of the music.
 - *Example:* Gospel singers use melisma and ornamentation to convey deep emotion and spiritual intensity.

By focusing on these elements, students can gain a deeper understanding of the features and cultural significance of African melodies, blue notes, melisma, ornamentation, and improvisation in music.

Appendix

Directions: Copy and paste select sources into the scaffold of choice.

Scaffold 1

Use this scaffold if you intend on substantively modifying the text. By including the original and modified side-by-side, students are able to digest information in a more student-friendly way, but also compare it to the original. This approach maintains the rigor and authenticity of the source analysis, as well as help students comprehend difficult text.

ORIGINAL	MODIFIED
[text]	[text]

Scaffold 2

Use this scaffold if you want students to conduct a close reading and/or want to analyze particular portions of the text.

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