



VH1 Ultimate Albums Alicia Keys, Songs in A Minor

VH1 Music Studio
Cable in the Classroom

Lesson for Music Classes, Grades 7-12

Lesson 1

Note to Teachers: The programs viewed in conjunction with these lesson plans may include references, consistent with the eras portrayed, to substance abuse, violent acts, and topics of a sexual and/or political nature. Because this may be considered inappropriate for classroom use in some communities, you are encouraged to review the programs before presenting them to your students, and if necessary, choose those sections that enhance your lesson and are acceptable for use in your classroom.

Objective

- Students will listen to and discuss modern popular music.
- Students will compare and contrast the musical style of Alicia Keys with those of other popular artists.
- Students will begin to recognize how musical elements from one era and/or genre can influence the development of another.

National Standards for Music Education

6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.
7. Evaluating music and music performances.
9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

Materials

- VHS VCR Player
- Television
- Audio playback equipment
- VH1's *Ultimate Albums: Alicia Keys, Songs in A Minor*
- Web-based lesson materials
- Pencils/pens and paper (students)
- Copies of Listening Chart for students (included with lesson)
- Teacher selected recordings representing the soul, rhythm and blues, and jazz genres, suggestions include: Marvin Gaye (*What's Been Going On*), The Temptations (*A Little Bit of Lonely*), Aretha Franklin (*You Make Me Feel Like a Natural Woman*), Smokey Robinson, etc.
- Teacher selected recordings of Alicia Keys' music from the albums *Songs in A Minor* and/or *The Diary of Alicia Keys*

Prior Knowledge:

- Students have experience discussing musical genres.
- Students are familiar with basic musical terms associated with rhythm, melody, tempo, dynamics, etc.

Procedures

1. Explain to students they are going to be watching a VH1 program highlighting the career of Alicia Keys. Ask them to pay specific attention to the segment in which she discusses her musical influences.
2. Show VH1's *Ultimate Albums: Alicia Keys, Songs in A Minor*, in its entirety.
3. After watching the program, distribute copies of the Listening Chart to students. Tell them they will be listening to several examples of musical styles that influenced Alicia Keys' music. While they are listening, they should make notes on their charts.
4. Play a teacher selected recording of an example of Jazz (Blues), and have students complete that section of their chart. Guide them in discovering the musical elements characteristic of the genre, and make sure their answers are accurate before moving on to the next example. Continue assisting students with completing their charts using teacher selected recordings of Rhythm and Blues and Soul music, playing them in chronological order as they are on the chart.
5. Play two teacher selected recordings of contrasting styles of Alicia Keys' music (see Step 8 for tie in), either from one of her albums (see "Materials"), or from examples on the Alicia Keys Web site (see "Supplemental Resources"). Have students complete the appropriate column of the chart, and lead them in discussing the elements of her music.
6. Using their completed charts, have students point out the similarities between Alicia Keys' musical style and

the styles exhibited in the examples of Jazz (Blues), R&B, and Soul. Examples include tempo, generally in 4/4 time, form, and a lyrical style that typically tells a story. Ask students to comment on the vocal styles used by the artists. Are there similarities in their inflection and phrasing?

7. Have students discuss the differences between Alicia Keys' music and that of the other artists they heard. Students will likely notice changes in the instrumentation through the different genres (as the electronic age surged forward, synthesizers added new sounds to 60s and 70s soul).
8. Draw students' attention to the varied styles that Keys presents through her music. Her songs *You Don't Know My Name* and *A Woman's Worth* are very reminiscent of 70s soul, but she also has other compositions that are more closely related to Hip Hop and classical forms. What conclusions can the students draw regarding the influences on Alicia Keys' music? How many genres appear to have had an affect on her style? Can this type of influence be found in the music of other popular artists?
9. Share the following excerpt from Alicia Keys' biography on her Web site with students:

“Reflecting on her latest project, Alicia notes: ‘My music doesn’t have a beginning or end. It’s continuous. I didn’t stop writing after the first album came out and everything I wrote since came from the experiences in my life, of being on the road, traveling, dealing with different situations. Once I got to the studio, I began to let those things out of me. By the time I did start thinking about how I wanted the new album to be, I had so many songs. You see I don’t put myself in any kind of box; I speak freely with my music. I knew that the second album would naturally be different from the first one because of all of the growing up I did during the past three years.’”

10. Remind students that the lyrics in Jazz and R&B are typically autobiographical and/or tell a story. Themes such as love, fitting into society, politics, and faith are predominant in all musical genres. How is this style similar to Alicia Keys method of composition? How does her biographical statement reinforce this thought process, or approach, to composition (she writes based on life experiences, she knew the second album would be different because she'd matured, etc.)?
11. In the program, Alicia Keys discusses her drive and need to make music. Have students explore the concept of why music is such a powerful emotional outlet. Why are the lyrics in Jazz so personal, and why do these musicians feel that music is their only medium for expression? Ask students to comment on the prominent themes in Alicia Keys music, including if she contends with any of the same political pressures that confronted artists in the past. own examples of how pop artists can impact culture through venues other than their music.

Extensions:

1. Lead students in further discussion of the role that politics and/or political statements plays in music. Could using politics as a theme in her music have helped Alicia Keys to emerge and become popular? Are there any underlying political issues in the country that would make certain types of music more popular than others?
2. Add a Hymn Song to the listening examples used in the first part of the lesson. Any Hymn Song by Holsinger would be applicable.

Listening Guide

	Jazz (Blues)	Rhythm and Blues	Soul	Alicia Keys
Lyrics <i>(what are they about, style, etc.)</i>				
Tempo <i>(fast, slow, changing, etc.)</i>				
Rhythm <i>(outline any repetitive figures, syncopated, straight, etc.)</i>				
Instrumentation <i>(types of instruments, number of singers, etc.)</i>				
Form <i>(ABA, ABCA, etc.)</i>				

Supplemental Resources:

- Alicia Keys Web site: www.aliciakeys.net
- Information and background on Soul music: www.soul-patrol.com/soul
- VH1's *Behind the Music 2000* lesson series provides additional resources for comparisons of music genres: www.vh1musicstudio.com/supplies/btm/btm_2000-1.html

National Standards for Music Education

1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments.
4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines.
5. Reading and notating music.
6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.
7. Evaluating music and music performances.
8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.
9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture.



These standards-based materials are provided through a partnership with MENC: The National Association for Music Education. This lesson plan was created by MENC member Patricia Wunsch, New Egypt High School, New Egypt, New Jersey.