



## ***Vh1 Rock Docs: The Night James Brown Saved Boston***

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.

### **Objectives**

- Students will be able to identify some of the main genres of African-American music.
- Students will be able to draw connections between societal influences and musical styles.

#### **National Standards for music education:**

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

## Materials

- Television
- DVD or VCR player
- CD player and speakers
- Recordings of James Brown songs (available on iTunes, amazon.com, and your local music store)
- Musical examples (recordings) from each of the following musical genres: African-American Spirituals, Blues, Jazz, Gospel, and R&B (suggested list below)
- Video recording: *Vh1 Rock Docs: The Night James Brown Saved Boston*
- Lesson 1 Worksheet – *Video Discussion Questions* (below)
- Lesson 1 Worksheet – *Listening to and Describing Music* (below)
- Lesson 1 Reference Sheet – *African-American Music Examples: Suggestions and Ideas* (below)
- Lesson 1 Reference Sheet – *Brief background information on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and James Brown* (below)
- Pens/Pencils (students)

### **Prior Knowledge:**

- Students have a basic understanding of the elements of music (style, timbre, expression, melody, rhythm, harmony, form, and lyrics). melody, rhythm, and form.

## Procedures

1. As students enter class, have a recording of an African-American Spiritual playing.
2. Ask students what they can tell you about African-American History. Lead the discussion with the following questions:
  - a. How did African-Americans first arrive in the United States?
  - b. What do you know about slavery? The Underground Railroad? Why were the slaves introduced to Christianity, and how did this give them hope?
  - c. What do you know about the Emancipation Proclamation and the Civil War?
3. Share with students how the slaves' music – field hollers, Negro Spirituals/African-American Spirituals – helped them to express their sadness and pain, cope with their hard working conditions, give them hope that they soon would be in a better place (heaven), and helped communicate secret messages about the Underground Railroad.
4. Play examples of spirituals for the students. Ask students to jot down a few notes in response to the questions on the worksheet “Listening to and Describing Music” (provided below) about the music they hear. Share and discuss students' answers as a class.

5. Ask students what they know about the lives of African-Americans after the Civil War. Lead the discussion with the following questions:
  - a. How were African-Americans treated after the Civil War? Were they treated with equal rights?
  - b. What types of work were African-Americans able to find? How were they paid?
  - c. Where did they have to sit on busses? At church? Were they allowed to go into restaurants/businesses/restrooms as others did?
6. Share with students that although African-Americans were now free, they still faced many struggles and were not yet treated with equality. Their music evolved into a new style to help them express their feelings, called “the blues.” Blues music sometimes had sad lyrics, while other songs were funny. Blues music would help to calm the listener or performer when they were upset. Although the lyrics are sometimes depressing, blues music is a way to make you feel better or give hope. Blues music started in the country, but travelers started to share their music with others. Cities, such as New Orleans, often had street peddlers who would help sell their goods by singing blues music to passersby. Blues eventually influenced white singers from the South, such as Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis. Many musicians still compose and perform blues music today.
7. Play examples of blues music for the students. Ask students to jot down a few notes in response to the questions on the worksheet “Listening to and Describing Music” about the music they hear. Share and discuss students’ answers as a class.
8. Continue with students by introducing another African-American style of music – jazz. Share with students the history of jazz music: As African-Americans started to move from the country to the cities, their music became faster and more rhythmic, and much of it was improvised (a term you may want to further describe). Many African-Americans moved to New Orleans, where the new style of jazz music started. It soon spread to Chicago and New York, and eventually around the world. Jazz music communicated to the black community with African-inspired percussion and complicated rhythms, wailing saxophones and trumpets, and complicated harmonies. It gained immense popularity and influenced several musicians outside of the black community, such as George Gershwin.
9. Play examples of jazz music for the students. Ask students to jot down a few notes in response to the questions on the worksheet “Listening to and Describing Music” about the music they hear. Share and discuss students’ answers as a class.
10. Ask students if they can guess what type of music you get if you combine the feeling of the blues, the excitement of jazz, and the religious message of spirituals all together. (Gospel) Share with students that gospel music started in churches as a way to inspire the congregation and infuse preachers’ teachings with excitement and involvement from the choir. Many future singing superstars such as Aretha Franklin and Diana Ross had their start singing in their church gospel choirs.
11. Play examples of gospel music for the students. Ask students to jot down a few notes in response to the questions on the worksheet “Listening to and Describing Music” about the music they hear. Share and discuss students’ answers as a class.

12. Share with students that as these African-American styles of music gained more and more popularity with the black community, white audiences also became more and more interested in these styles of music. However, African-Americans were still not being treated equally in our communities, our schools, or in the music business. But this did not hold them back. They eventually started their own recording businesses and record labels, such as “Motown Records” and the musical style of Rhythm & Blues, or R&B was created.
13. Play examples of Motown and R&B music for the students. Ask students to jot down a few notes in response to the questions on the worksheet “Listening to and Describing Music” about the music they hear. Share and discuss students’ answers as a class.

**[Note: At this point, Lesson 1 and Lesson 2 overlap. If you are only doing Lesson 1, continue on with procedures 14-17. If you are doing Lesson 2, skip these last steps.]**

14. Preface the viewing of the video with the following discussion questions.
  - a. Discuss what students already know.
    - i. What do you know about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.? Who was he? What did he represent? What can you tell me about the Civil Rights Movement? How did Dr. King die?
    - ii. How many of you know of a singer named James Brown? What can you tell me about him? Do you know any of his songs?
  - b. Distribute and read the handout “Brief background information on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and James Brown” in class.
15. Play for students examples of James Brown’s music (see suggestions below).
16. Watch the video “Vh1 Rock Docs: The Night James Brown Saved Boston” in its entirety.
17. After viewing the video, instruct students to answer the questions on the hand-out “Video Discussion Questions” (provided below). Allow students time to write, and then discuss their answers together in class.

#### **Extensions:**

1. Continue with Lessons 2 and 3.
2. Continue history of African American music by having students research how R&B music influenced and evolved into Rap and Hip-Hop music.
3. Students can perform various styles of African-American music. There are numerous choral arrangements of spirituals for all levels of singers and/or choirs, jazz band and vocal jazz arrangements of blues music and jazz standards, and choral arrangements and sheet music of gospel tunes. For a fun activity, you can download “karaoke” versions of several Motown and R&B songs from iTunes and provide lyric sheets for your students to sing along with as well. [Standard #1]
4. Play a standard blues chord progression on the piano or bass. Instruct students (individuals or small groups) to compose lyrics in blues form (AAB) and have them perform them for the class as you accompany them. Their blues lyrics can be about anything that causes “blues” in their life – home work, cleaning their room, school lunch, etc. [Standard #1, 4]

### Supplemental Resources:

- **VH1 Website:** [http://www.vh1.com/shows/dyn/vh1\\_rock\\_docs/134183/episode.jhtml](http://www.vh1.com/shows/dyn/vh1_rock_docs/134183/episode.jhtml) which includes links to videos, interviews, and a list of “Ten Essential James Brown Tracks”
- **Television Station WGBH** – Boston [http://www.wgbh.org/article?item\\_id=3196439](http://www.wgbh.org/article?item_id=3196439) . This site has a link to view the 1968 James Brown Live at the Boston Garden concert in its entirety.
- **Wikipedia** – James Brown [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James\\_Brown](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Brown) A comprehensive biography and resource on James Brown with many links.
- **Wikipedia** - Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin\\_Luther\\_King](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Luther_King) A comprehensive biography and resource on Dr. King, with many links and references, including links to web-based video and audio materials
- **Be a Friend: The Story of African American Music by Leotha Stanley.** Zion Press Children’s Books, Middleton, Wisconsin. 1994. ISBN 1-55933-153-4 (CD Included. Available at amazon.com or your local bookseller) This book is targeted for an elementary-aged class room, and the accompanying songs are be a bit childish for 7-12th grade students. However, the historical information is clear and easy to understand and provides a good source of information.

### 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.

## Lesson 1 Worksheet – Listening to and Describing Music

What is the **style** or genre of this music?

What is the **timbre** of this music? What instruments do you hear? Are there any voices? How would you describe the voices?

Does this song have **harmony**? Is the music major or minor? Does it change within the song?

What type of musical **expression** do you hear in the song? Describe the tempo, dynamics, and articulations.

Describe the **rhythm** of this song. Does it have a strong beat? What meter is it in (4/4, 3/4, 6/8)? Do you hear complicated rhythms or syncopation?

What is the **form** of this song? Does it repeat in sections? Is there a chorus or refrain? Verses?

Does this song have lyrics? What are the lyrics about? Do the lyrics fit well with the music?

How does this music compare with other styles and genres of music? Similarities? Contrasts?

Do you like this music? Why or why not? Who was this music created for? To whom would you recommend this music?

## Lesson 1 Reference Sheet – Brief background information on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and James Brown

**Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**, born January 15, 1929, was a prominent leader in the American civil rights movement. He entered Morehouse College at age 15, continuing his education at seminary, and eventually earning his doctorate at Boston University. As a Baptist minister, Reverend King preached for peaceful actions, demonstrations, and government lobbying to end segregation and racial discrimination. He championed the rights of African-Americans through civil obedience and non-violent means. His efforts led to several historic events in the civil rights movement, including the 1963 March on Washington, where King delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. In 1964, King became the youngest person to receive the Nobel Peace Prize for his work promoting civil rights. Dr. King was assassinated on April 4, 1968, in Memphis, Tennessee. He was only 39 years old. Although Dr. King preached non-violence and civil obedience, his tragic death led to a nationwide wave of riots across the country. His death had shaken the nation, causing great sadness and anger. President Lyndon B. Johnson declared a national day of mourning for the lost civil rights leader in the days following his death. Years later in 1986, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day was established as a national holiday in the United States to honor this American leader's life and remember his important message of peaceful actions and civil rights.

**James Brown**, known as the "The Godfather of Soul", the "King of Funk", and "The Hardest Working Man in Show Business", was born May 3, 1933. He is recognized as one of the most influential figures in 20th century popular music and was renowned for his singing, his energetic and theatrical concerts, and his signature dance moves. Brown began his professional music career in 1953, and rose to fame during the late 1950s and early 1960s on the strength of his thrilling live performances and numerous hit songs. In addition to his acclaim in music, Brown was a presence in American political affairs during the 1960s and 1970s, noted especially for his activism on behalf of fellow African Americans and the poor. During the early 1980s, Brown's music helped to shape the rhythms of early hip-hop music, with numerous groups sampling his funk grooves and turning them into what became hip hop classics and the foundations of the music genre. During his long career, James Brown received several prestigious music industry awards and honors, including being named as one of the first inductees to the Rock-n-Roll Hall of Fame, and receiving a Lifetime Achievement Award at the 1992 Grammy Awards Ceremony. In 2004, *Rolling Stone* magazine ranked James Brown as #7 on its list of the 100 Greatest Artists of All Time. On Christmas Day, 2006, James Brown died from congestive heart failure resulting from complications of pneumonia. Brown's relatives and friends, who included several celebrities and African-American leaders, along with thousands of fans attended public memorial services at the Apollo Theater in New York.

Source:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin\\_Luther\\_King](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Luther_King)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James\\_Brown](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Brown)

## Lesson 1 - Worksheet – Video Discussion Questions

1) What emotions did the African-American community feel upon hearing the news of Dr. King's assassination?

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2) How did James Brown's concert help "save" Boston? How did this concert help people deal with their emotions?

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3) What affect did this have on James Brown's career? How did the African-American community view him? What was the response to his song "Say It Loud: I'm Black and I'm Proud"?

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**Lesson 1 – African-American Music Examples: Suggestions and Ideas**  
**(All recordings can be found on iTunes, amazon.com, or at your local music store.)**

**Spirituals**

- “Motherless Child” by Bertha (Underwood) Morgan. (Album: Sings Negro Spirituals – Songs of the Soul)
- “Soon I Will Be Done” by Bertha (Underwood) Morgan. (Album: Sings Negro Spirituals – Songs of the Soul)
- “Everybody Talkin’ About Heaven Ain’t Goin’ There” by Dock Reed (Album: Negro Folk Music of Alabama, Vol. 5: Spirituals)
- “Great Day” by Moses Hogan (Album: Negro Spirituals)

**Blues**

- “St. Louis Blues” by W.C. Handy & Bessie Smith (Album: Bessie Smith: The Collection)
- “Downhearted Blues” by Bessie Smith (Album: The Essence of Bessie Smith)
- “Bo-Weevil Blues” by Ma Rainey (Album: Ma Rainey, Vol. 1, 1923-1924)
- “Red House” by Jimi Hendrix (Album: Experience Hendrix – the Best of Jimi Hendrix)
- “Enyaach equll (I’m a Long Way from Home) by Tracy Lee Nelson (Album: Hot Cup of Blues)
- “Give Me One Reason” by Tracy Chapman (Album: Ultimate Grammy Colelction: Contemporary Rock)

**Jazz**

- “New Orleans Stomp” by Louis Armstrong (Album: 20 Best of Louis Armstrong)
- “Stompin’ At the Savoy” by Louis Armstrong (Album: 20 Best of Louis Armstrong)
- “In a Sentimental Mood” by John Coltrane & Duke Ellington (Album: The Very Best of John Coltrane)
- “Blue Monk” by Thelonious Monk Quartet with John Coltrane (Album: Thelonious Monk with John Coltrane at Carnegie Hall)
- “Move” by Miles Davis (Album: Birth of the Cool)
- “Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea” by Ella Fitzgerald (Album: Ella Fitzgerald: The Best of the Song books)
- “God Bless the Child” by Billie Holiday (Album: The Very Best of Billie Holiday)

**Gospel**

- “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands” by Mahalia Jackson (Album: The Essential Mahalia Jackson)
- “Take My Hand, Precious Lord” by Mahalia Jackson (Album: The Essential Mahalia Jackson)
- “It’s a Highway to Heaven” by Thomas A. Dorsey (Album: Precious Lord Recordings of the Great Gospel Songs of Thomas A. Dorsey)
- “Oh Happy Day” by The Edwin Hawkins Singers (Album: Oh Happy Day)
- “Get Right Church” by Rev. James Cleveland & The Voices of Tabernacle (Album: Great Gospel Singers)
- “We Shall Not Be Moved” by Sweet Honey In the Rock (Album: Still the Same Me)

**R&B/Motown**

- “Please Mr. Postman” by The Marvelettes (Album: Motown 1’s)
- Ain’t too Proud to Beg by The Temptations (Album: Motown 1’s)
- “My Girl” by The Temptations (Album: Motown 1’s)
- “Stop! In the Name of Love” by The Supremes (Album: Motown 1’s)
- “I Heard It Through the Grapevine” by Marvin Gaye (Album: Motown 1’s)
- “Superstition” by Stevie Wonder (Album: Stevie Wonder: The Definitive Collection)
- “Think” by Aretha Franklin (Album: 30 Greatest Hits)
- “What’d I Say” by Ray Charles (Album: The Great Hits of Ray Charles)
- “I Got You (I Feel Good)” by James Brown (Album: 20 All Time Greatest Hits!)
- “It’s a Man’s Man’s Man’s World by James Brown (Album: 20 All Time Greatest Hits!)
- “Get Up Offa That Thing” by James Brown (Album: 20 All Time Greatest Hits!)
- “Say It Loud (I’m Black and I’m Proud) by James Brown (Album: 20 All Time Greatest Hits!)



*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 Kathryn E. Briggs, St. Mary's Academy, Portland, Oregon.*