



Resource Guide for Educators and Students Grades 4–12

What is traditional music? It's music that's passed on from one person to another, music that arises from one or more cultures, from their history and geography. It's music that can tell a story or evoke emotions ranging from celebratory joy to quiet reflection. Traditional music is usually played live in community settings such as dances, people's houses and small halls.

In each 30-minute episode of Carry On™, musical explorer and TikTok sensation Hal Walker interviews a musician who plays traditional music. Episodes air live, allowing students to pose questions. Programs are then archived so you can listen to them any time from your classroom or home. Visit Carry On's [YouTube channel](#) for live shows and archived episodes.

[Episode 10, Austin Walkin' Cane](#)

Austin Walkin' Cane is a Cleveland-based blues singer, songwriter and guitarist. He has made eight blues records and tours the world playing original and classic Delta blues on acoustic and slide guitar. Austin was nominated for the 2015 Blues Music Award's Best New Artist Album from the Blues Foundation in Memphis, Tennessee.

Austin began playing guitar when he was 14. He was influenced by rock and roll guitar players, who in turn had been influenced by blues musicians from the American South. "I started doing my homework," says Austin, listening to and then playing and singing the blues.

The blues is a traditional musical genre created by African Americans in the late 1800s and early 1900s in the US South. Blues music has had a great influence on other musical styles and genres, including rock and roll, jazz and popular music. Its roots are in African American musical traditions such as work songs sung in the fields, "[field hollers](#)," spirituals and ballads. Early blues had certain characteristics:

- A singer accompanied by a guitar. As the blues took hold, instrumentation expanded.
- An expression of "the blues"—feelings of loss and desire. As time went on, expression expanded into protest, nostalgia, optimism, celebration and current events. (See the video "[The Blues Lives On](#)" described in Resources, below.)

- Song lyrics about loss, love problems, suffering and grief at having to leave family and home behind during enslavement, imprisonment, or the Great Migration of the early 20th century as African Americans left the South to find safety and jobs.
- "Blue" notes that singers and instrumentalists created by "bending notes" around the third, fifth and seventh degrees of the diatonic scale. Instruments like slide guitar and harmonica did this easily, imitating or echoing the voice.

The classic 12-bar blues consists of three chords played over 12 measures ("bars"), usually in slow, steady 4/4 time. Lyrics are in verses of three lines with an AAB rhyme scheme—the "A" part of the verse is repeated, and the last "B" line rhymes with the end of the "A" line. [This PBS webpage](#) maps an example. Musicians may put the chords in slightly different order, but in general, the first 4 bars emphasize the I chord (built on the first note of the scale), the second 4 bars emphasize the IV chord (built on the fourth note of the scale) and the third 4 bars emphasize the V chord (built on the fifth note of the scale). Here is what Austin demonstrated on our episode (assuming that he's playing in the key of G):

Measure 1 1-2-3-4 (beats) I ("one") chord (G)	Measure 2 1-2-3-4 I ("one") chord (G)	Measure 3 1-2-3-4 I ("one") chord (G)	Measure 4 1-2-3-4 I ("one") chord (G)
Measure 5 1-2-3-4 IV ("four") chord (C)	Measure 6 1-2-3-4 IV ("four") chord (C)	Measure 7 1-2-3-4 I ("one") chord (G)	Measure 8 1-2-3-4 I ("one") chord (G)
Measure 9 1-2-3-4 V ("five") chord (D)	Measure 10 1-2-3-4 IV ("four") chord (C)	Measure 11 1-2-3-4 I ("one") chord (G)	Measure 12 1-2-3-4 V ("five") chord (D)

The Delta blues is a style that matured in the 1920s and 1930s among numerous musicians in the Mississippi Delta region, which stretched through Arkansas, Mississippi and Louisiana along the fertile land near the Mississippi River. Musicians—most from Mississippi—learned the tradition by listening to or learning from other players. Guitar and harmonica were primary instruments; slide guitar became a hallmark of the style.

Vocabulary

Genre – A particular style of music. For example, jazz, country, classical, hip hop and traditional are all different genres of music. There are often subgenres under main genres; Baroque is a subgenre of classical music.

Lyrics – The words of a song.

Scale – A set of musical notes. The classic blues scale is based on a pentatonic (5-note) minor scale, with a 6th "blue" note added between the 4th and 5th degrees of the scale. (Even though the blues scale consists of 5 notes, "degrees" refer to the standard diatonic scale, which is 7 notes. A diatonic scale from A to A means the 5th degree is the note E.) Putting the blue note

between the 4th and 5th degree of the scale would make an A minor blues scale A – C – D – E flat – E – G (and back to A). The blue note is E flat.

Slide guitar – Guitar played with a hard object, such as a glass ring or a short metal tube, that fits on a finger of the hand that stops the strings of the guitar. In a right-handed player, the right hand plucks the strings while the left hand plays the slide along the neck.

Time signature (or meter) – The division of music into patterns of repeated rhythm, or beats. A 4/4 meter indicates four beats repeated over and over in units called measures, or bars. The bottom number (4) means that the quarter note gets one beat. You can usually identify the meter by tapping along and noticing how often the strong beats occur.

Activities and Questions for Students

Before you watch the episode—Locate the following places on [Google Maps](#) or a printed map.

Countries: The United States, Australia, New Zealand, Nepal, Colombia, France, Germany, Belgium, England, Ireland, Wales (countries where Austin has toured and played).

States: Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana (states bordering the Mississippi River in the Delta region).

Cities: Cleveland (Ohio), New Orleans (Louisiana), Chicago (Illinois), Memphis (Tennessee).

After you watch the episode—Complete assigned activities and questions from this list, which progresses from simpler to more complex.

1. Blues legend B.B. King had a guitar he named Lucille. You can see the name on his guitar at the beginning of [this YouTube video](#) of him playing and talking about Lucille. What name would you give (or have you given) your musical instrument? If you don't play an instrument, have you ever named a pet, or a house, or something else that's familiar to you (but not human)? Why do you think B.B. King wanted to give his guitar a name?
2. Watch this part of a video with [Austin playing the slide guitar](#). What does the slide do to the sound? (The video shows his left hand, so you can actually see when he starts using it.) Describe it like you would to someone who's never heard slide guitar. Or write a poem to describe the sound; for fun, write it using mostly adjectives (like "smooth") and just one or two nouns.
3. [In our episode](#), Austin tells the story of how he got his stage name, Walkin' Cane. Many blues musicians had stage names. McKinley Morganfield became Muddy Waters. Chester Burnett became Howlin' Wolf. If you could pick a stage name, what would it be?
4. It's obvious that our host Hal is a fan of the blues; his enthusiasm encourages Austin to discuss what he loves about the blues. If you play an instrument, or like to listen to music, or play a sport that you enjoy, what do you love about it? What about it made you want to do it in the first place?
5. You are a reporter for your school's newspaper. Write and illustrate a review of Austin Walkin' Cane, what he talked about, and the music you heard. Describe the music, your

favorite things about it, and what more you wish you could see or know about. Be sure to give your article a descriptive title!

6. Look at [this map](#) of the Mississippi Delta region from the National Park Service and read the section "Importance/Significance." Why do you think this region was so fertile for crops and for the blues?
7. Listen to the beginning of these two YouTube videos—one of guitarist [Eric Clapton](#) and one of his idol [B.B. King](#). What stylistic characteristics do you think Clapton picked up from King—what's similar about their styles? And what's different about their styles?
8. Listen to the beginning of these two YouTube videos—one of 1960s guitarist [Jimi Hendrix](#) and one of his guitar hero [Albert King](#). What stylistic characteristics do you think Hendrix picked up from King—what's similar about their styles? And what's different about their styles?
9. Listen to the beginning of these two YouTube videos—one of guitarist [Keith Richards](#) (of the Rolling Stones), and one of guitar great [Robert Johnson](#). What stylistic characteristics do you think Richards picked up from Johnson—what's similar about their styles? And what's different about their styles?
10. Robert Johnson is sometimes known as the King of the Delta Blues, and Charley Patton as the Father of the Delta Blues. Do some Internet research—why were they so influential on other Delta blues musicians? And how well known were they outside the Mississippi Delta?

Additional Resources

Austin Walkin' Cane

[Austin's website](#) and [biography](#).

[Austin's Facebook page](#), "Wire & Wood Blues." During the pandemic, he plays live every Saturday and Sunday at 10:30 am.

The Blues

"[The Blues Lives On](#)" – A video from the Delta Blues Museum in Clarksdale, Mississippi, that tells the story of the Delta blues. Narrated by actor Morgan Freeman, it discusses the beginnings of the art form in the late 1800s and early 1900s, as well as the subject matter of blues songs.

[The Mississippi Blues Trail](#) (website) – A project of the Mississippi Blues Commission. On the website, [the "trail" has "markers"](#) with information about influential blues musicians and locations important to the blues. Markers include maps so people can visit physical locations. The website also provides a list of blues museums and tours in the Mississippi Delta and neighboring Memphis, Tennessee.

Blues musicians (websites) – Lists from Wikipedia of [Delta blues musicians](#) and [blues musicians](#) from different areas and regions.

[This YouTube video](#) shows how to play a simple blues scale on the guitar.

Tell us what you think!

We want to make Carry On™ even more useful and enjoyable for students and educators across the country. [Send us your feedback!](#) Tell us what you liked and what we could do better. And please... tell other educators and schools about the show. Help us all carry on!

With the help of generous donors, [Carry On](#)™ is produced by the nonprofit [Northeast Ohio Musical Heritage Association](#) (NEOMHA). The show is programmed by [Laura Lewis](#), artistic director of NEOMHA's [Lake Erie Folk Fest](#). Carry On's resource guides are the work of writer and musician [Rita Lewis](#).

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