

Lesson Objectives (suggested grade levels: 4-8)

In this lesson, students will be able to discover the rich heritage of American roots music, compare it to their own musical heritage, and learn the context in which the music was developed.

National Standards:*Social Studies:*

Culture: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.

Time, Continuity, & Change: Social Studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ways human beings view themselves in and over time.

People, Places & Environments: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, place, and environments.

English Language Arts:

Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g. libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.

CONTENT**Pre-visit**

Worksheet 1: *What are My Roots?*

Visit

Worksheet 2: *Global Origins*

Worksheet 3: *Themes of American Roots Music*

Post-visit

Activity 1: *The Big Picture*

Activity 2: *Musical Heritage*

Materials

World map; CD player or web access to *New Harmonies* favorites on www.museumonmainstreet.org

Lesson 2: Background

Much of American roots music came from immigrants from Europe, enslaved peoples from West and Central Africa, and Native Americans already here. Over time, European and African music traditions blended to create a variety of roots music forms, including folk ballads, country, blues, and gospel. As new waves of immigrants came to America, they added their music traditions to the mix.

Music is often a connecting force between the immigrant experience and the process of “becoming an American.” Whether students in your classroom are recent immigrants or have deep roots in America, their families have unique musical traditions.

Teacher Instructions

Each lesson is intended to prepare students for a visit to *New Harmonies: Celebrating American Roots Music* and to follow up on that visit after your return to the classroom.

The **Pre-Visit** worksheets are designed to stimulate the students’ curiosity about the exhibition and to encourage the students to explore their own musical roots. The **Visit** activities invite the students to collect information and apply their new-found knowledge in the classroom. The **Post-Visit** activities draw on their own heritage and the information learned during their museum visit. All of these activities can be completed in groups or by individual students.

Pre-visit

Several days before visiting the exhibit, make copies of *Worksheet 1: What are My Roots* for all of the students. Hand out the sheets a few days before your visit so that students have enough time to interview friends and/or family. If a student is unable to interview a family member or does not have access to the information, allow the student to select a country and research its musical traditions.

Use name tags or other stickers, and have each student write the probable country of origin of their family or the country that the student selected on the stickers (one country per sticker). On the day that students visit the exhibit, have them wear these stickers.

Using a dictionary, have students (individually or as a class) define the following:

Freedom
Democracy
Independence
Diversity
Ingenuity

Lead a discussion about the meaning of these words and how they may relate to the themes of American Roots Music. The meanings of these words in the exhibit are from a musical perspective, and the comparison with the definitions from the dictionary (and the musical applications) can set up an interesting discussion.

Post a map of the world in the classroom and ask students to put a pin on their family's country of origin or the country that the students selected for study. If time allows, ask them to share some information about the musical traditions of that country.

Visit

Before going to the exhibit, make a copy of *Worksheet 2: Themes of American Roots Music* for each student.

At the exhibition, pass out this worksheet. As students explore *New Harmonies*, ask them to complete the worksheet (individually or in small groups). The worksheet is designed to help students collect information that will be used in the Post-visit activity.

Make sure each student has a pencil (not pen) to write down the information. (Pens make permanent marks, and museums generally prefer the use of pencils in their exhibits.) You may wish to collect the papers from the students before leaving the exhibition.

Post-visit

After returning to the classroom, targeted activities will help the students apply information learned during the exhibition visit. These activities involve higher-level thinking skills such as interpretation, synthesis, thinking hypothetically and/or expressing judgment.

PRE-VISIT

Worksheet 1: *What are my Roots?*

BACKGROUND

Find out where your ancestors lived. Ask your parent, guardian, or relatives. There may be several countries of origin included in your family history. Try to record them all.

Country of origin: _____

1. Research the musical traditions of countries in your family's history. List three interesting facts about music played in those countries.

2. Describe any musical traditions or celebrations that your family enjoys.

3. Name some instruments that are played, or have been played, by you or your family.

4. When and how did your family members learn how to play these instruments?

5. Are there any annual heritage music festivals in your community? If so, identify the type of music played there.

VISIT

Worksheet 3: *Themes of American Roots Music*

Draw a line from the theme to its correct description:

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| <i>Ingenuity</i> | <i>In American roots music everyone is invited to participate. Music is an avenue for people to make their voices heard.</i> |
| <i>Independence</i> | <i>American roots music comes from many different peoples from many different parts of the world. As waves of immigrants came to America, they added their music traditions to the mix.</i> |
| <i>Freedom</i> | <i>Every musician finds his or her own way</i> |
| <i>Democracy</i> | <i>Many roots musicians are creative in developing new songs and new instruments. Singers swap songs and rhythms. Spoons and washboards become musical instruments.</i> |
| <i>Diversity</i> | <i>Musicians are free to choose, to change, or to hang on to what's important to them in their music. Country singers borrow from the blues. Blues musicians pick up a thing or two from country. In music, barriers fall.</i> |

Consider the definitions above:

- Find songs and/or lyrics in the exhibit that reflect each of the themes
- Explain why each of your choices is a good example for that theme

	Songs and/or lyrics	Explanation
Freedom		
Democracy		
Independence		
Diversity		
Ingenuity		

POST-VISIT

Activity 1: The Big Picture

1. Designate a place in the classroom for each of the exhibition themes (freedom, democracy, independence, diversity, ingenuity), and divide the class into five groups so that each group represents one of the themes. Ask the students to go to the designated area for their theme.
2. Once in their groups, ask students to share information about the songs they thought best represented their theme. It may be helpful if students consult their answers from *Worksheet 2: Themes of American Roots Music*.
3. Each group should select one song (or lyrics from a song) to share with the class. This song will be the group's theme song. Students can use the Internet to find lyrics and listen to the music. Lyrics for many of their favorites may be found at <http://www.niehs.nih.gov/kids/music.htm>.
4. After each group has finished the assignment, ask the groups to share their findings with the class. Each group will play the selected theme song or read song lyrics. Have the groups explain their exhibition themes (freedom, democracy, independence, diversity, ingenuity) and the definition as it pertains to the exhibition.

POST-VISIT**Activity 2: *Musical Heritage***

1. Post a world map on the classroom wall and ask students to put a pin in the country or location of their family's places of origin or of countries that they researched in the Pre-visit activity. This may be done before going to visit the exhibition.
2. Study the world map and find out how many countries are represented by the heritage of the students in the classroom. Using *Worksheet 1: What are My Roots?* and *Worksheet 2: Global Origins*, allow students to share the information they gathered about their family roots and the musical traditions from their places of origin.
3. Lead a discussion about the spread and impact of music that came to America from other countries. Ask students if they heard or read about music from their own countries of origin in the exhibition. If not, do the students think music from their backgrounds will be discussed in some future Smithsonian exhibit? Why or why not?
4. If there are any local musical groups or music festivals in your area related to American roots music, encourage your students to attend for extra credit. Have them write a journal entry or be a reporter about the event. How many people were there? What kind of music was played? How did the audience respond to the music?
5. If possible, invite a local musician to the classroom to play music from his/her own musical heritage.