



# Blind Willie Johnson Lesson Plan



# Lesson title: Blind Willie Johnson

## Subject and topic:

history, reading, ELA, black history

## Grade level:

9th-12th

## Duration:

50 minutes

## Lesson summary:

Students will learn about one of the most influential blues guitarists of the early 1900s, Blind Willie Johnson. They will read an article detailing his life and how he is remembered. The class will then listen to an example of his music, and covers of his music. Students will also discuss how blind musicians can help advance the discussion concerning the stigma of disability.

## Standards:

- CC: 8.3.9.A: Compare the role groups and individuals played in the social, political, cultural, and economic development of the U.S.
- CC: 8.3.9.B : Compare the impact of historical documents, artifacts, and places which are critical to the U.S.
- CC: 8.3.12.A: Evaluate the role groups and individuals from the U.S. played in the social, political, cultural, and economic development of the world.
- 8.3.12.B: Evaluate the impact of historical documents, artifacts, and places in U.S. history which are critical to world history.



- 8.4.12.A: Evaluate the role groups and individuals played in the social, political, cultural, and economic development throughout world history.
- 8.4.12.B: Evaluate the importance of historical documents, artifacts, and sites which are critical to world history.
- 9.1.12.F: Analyze works of arts influenced by experiences or historical and cultural events through production, performance or exhibition.
- 9.2.12.A: Explain the historical, cultural and social context of an individual work in the arts.
- 9.2.12.D: Analyze a work of art from its historical and cultural perspective.

### Objectives:

#### SWBAT

- read and discuss an article on a blind blues guitarist from the early 1900s.
- listen to music from Blind Willie Johnson and covers of his music.
- Analyze what impact seeing celebrated blind musicians can have on young students with disabilities, especially blind students.

### Essential Questions:

- EQ1: Describe the impact of Blind Willie Johnson.

### Vocabulary:

- Blind(ness)
- The Voyager Mission



## Materials:

Article: [Dark Was the Night: The Legacy of Blind Willie Johnson](#)

Slideshow: [Blind-Willie-Johnson-Powerpoint](#)

Worksheet: [“Dark Was the Night: The Legacy of Blind Willie Johnson” Guided Reading Worksheet](#)

## Lesson procedures

### **Pre-Lesson Steps:**

1. Have do now activity instructions ready for students to see. A [PowerPoint presentation](#) for the do now is linked to this lesson plan.
2. Have worksheet and [article](#) printed and ready to be handed out to the students. If this is a virtual lesson, email this worksheet to your students and send them the link to the reading, or put it in your school's file exchange system (Google classroom, Itunes U, ect...).

### **Lesson Procedure:**

#### Post Lesson:

1. The papers that are handed in by the students can be evaluated to see if students met the objectives of the lesson.
2. Have the PowerPoint open and on the “do now” slide.
3. If you run out of time and do not get to discuss the “Exit Ticket” questions, you could have students share their answers as a “Do Now” activity the next lesson.

#### Lesson Steps:

1. (Slide 1 and 2) Have students complete the activity. Students will do a think, pair, share activity for this lesson’s do now. Use the PowerPoint for this lesson for this part. There are notes in the PowerPoint for you as well. Students will have to formulate an answer to this question:



- a. What song would you choose to send into space to introduce Aliens to human culture?
2. After students take 2 to 3 minutes to write an answer for that question, have them pair up with someone to share their answer. Tell students they must explain why they chose the song they did.
3. After that, have students volunteer to share what they chose and why.
4. Then tell them that today they will be learning about an American musician whose music was sent by NASA into space for the purpose of introducing humans to galactic travelers.
4. (Slide 3 and 4) Tell students that today they will be learning about Blind Willie Johnson, an American blues musician that lived from 1897 to 1945. You can then introduce the students to Blind Willie Johnson with this 1:45 long video: [Music Matters: Blind Willie Johnson](#) (read text aloud so it's accessible to all students)
5. After watching the video, ask students if they have any reflections on what they just saw. If no one does, that is fine, just move on, but make sure students who want to say something can.
6. (Slide 5) Then introduce the assignment for this lesson. A worksheet for the students is attached and includes the instructions for the assignment. Essentially, students will be reading the article, answering questions about it on their own, and then have a discussion as a class afterwards
7. Give students about 10 to 15 minutes to answer the questions on their own. Instruct them to not fill out the last question. That will be a part of the exit ticket.
8. After students have completed the assignment, bring the class together and go over each of the questions. Make sure to allow for discussion of questions. This should be a time where you discuss the answer, not just report them.



9. (Slide 6) Play the students the Blind Willie Johnson song that was sent to space by NASA, “Dark Was The Night, Cold Was The Ground” while they complete the exit ticket question.
10. Have students complete the exit ticket section, and then hand in their worksheets on the way out. They need to hear the music to answer this question. The song is on slide 6, or you can use the link provided in this lesson plan under the materials section.

#### Post Lesson Steps:

1. Review the exit ticket responses to make sure students reached the learning objectives.

#### Evaluation:

Students will submit exit tickets.

Ask your students the question below related to this lesson to gauge how much they learned. **Did this lesson teach you that music can have an impact on society? Yes or no**

Thank you for bringing the conversation about disability into your classroom.

Help us evaluate this lesson plan by visiting [our evaluation page to assess this lesson](#). You will find an evaluation both for you and your students to complete there.



## “Dark Was the Night: The Legacy of Blind Willie Johnson” Guided Reading Worksheet

Instructions: Please fill out the questions to this worksheet while you are reading the article titled “Dark Was the Night: The Legacy of Blind Willie Johnson.” You will complete every question below except for the question labeled exit ticket. Please be sure to answer in complete sentences and be prepared to share your answer with the class.

1. What message does the author say the song “Dark Was the Night” will give to aliens that might find it one day?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Where and when was Blind Willie Johnson born? What do you know about that time-period? Write down 2 points about that time-period that we have learned about in class.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Was Blind Willie Johnson born Blind? Or did he become blind?







Exit Ticket: Once you have completed the 7 questions above, please wait for the class to catch up so we can complete the exit ticket section together. For this exit ticket we will listen to the song “Dark Was the Night.” While listening to this please write a paragraph in response to this question:

How would you describe “Dark Was the Night” and why do you think NASA chose it to be one of the songs sent in to space? How do you think Blind Willie Johnson’s life and the time he lived influence his sound? What emotions could you tie to this song? Please do your best to give your responses. There are no right or wrong answers, but you must explain your answers.

