

It's a Long Way from Home

Lesson 5: Conversation in the Round

Essential Questions

What were Chicago's black-and-tan clubs? How did Chicago's black-and-tan clubs represent an important step forward in cultural integration? How did jazz music bring black and white communities together? How does music today break down racial barriers?

Desired Understandings

Students will understand why the nation's first integrated nightclubs emerged on the South Side of Chicago in the 1920s. They will understand why jazz music and the rebellious spirit of the age provided fertile ground for breaking down racial barriers. They will understand how the spirit of the Jazz Age is paralleled in music and culture today.

Knowledge

Students will know the history and significance of Chicago's black-and-tan nightclubs. They will know why those clubs emerged exclusively in Chicago. They will know how the spirit of the Jazz Age is paralleled in rap culture today.

Skills

Students will use their analytical and language arts skills to summarize their positions and formulate questions for personal and collective inquiry. Students will develop historical empathy and learn to discern fact from fiction. They will use their writing skills to summarize their interpretations.

Illinois Learning Standards

English Language Arts

- Goal 1: Read with understanding and fluency.
- Goal 2: Read and understand literature representative of various societies, eras, and ideas.
- Goal 3: Write to communicate for a variety of purposes.
- Goal 4: Listen and speak effectively in a variety of situations.
- Goal 5: Use the language arts to acquire, assess, and communicate information.

Social Science

- Goal 15: Understand economic systems, with an emphasis on the United States.
- Goal 16: Understand events, trends, individuals, and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the United States, and other nations.
- Goal 17: Understand world geography and the effects of geography on society, with an emphasis on the United States.
- Goal 18: Understand social systems, with an emphasis on the United States.

In This Lesson

Through group discussion, students will be challenged to compare the history of jazz and Chicago's black-and-tan nightclubs to today's music and culture. They will formulate and support their own opinions, both verbally and in writing. The story element of dramatic tension is addressed. This lesson was researched and written by Diane Shalda.



Activity

When students arrive in class, have the following quotes written on the board:

- “Unless we speak against this, it will creep continually into our society and destroy the morals of our young people.”
- “I think that nothing less is at stake than the preservation of civilization.”
- “It’s controversial because it provides something different.”

Ask students to theorize who spoke the sentences and what they think the quotes refer to. In the context of this unit on the Jazz Age, they might guess the quotes refer to jazz. Tell them that the quotes are from (from top to bottom) Reverend Calvin Butts, William Bennett of Empower America, and Chuck D, all speaking about rap music.

Distribute copies of the handout on Chicago’s black-and-tans at the end of this lesson. Lead a class discussion about the writer’s theory about the allure of Chicago’s black-and-tans. Do students agree or disagree? How might his theory connect to today’s controversy over gangster rap and explicit song lyrics? What concerns still exist over the effect that some predominantly African American music may have on its listeners? What social and political conditions that nurtured jazz might have also provided fertile ground for the development of rap? Why is music often an entry point for bridging cultural differences?

Lesson 5 Home Connection

Have students write a two-page essay comparing and contrasting jazz and rap. How did the two musical genres bridge America’s cultural divides? Is rap “dangerous”? Why or why not?

Materials & Resources

- **Printouts of *It's a Long Way from Home*:**
http://www.GreatChicagoStories.org/pdf/story/Its_A_Long_Way_from_Home_by_Katherine_San_Fratello.pdf
- **The Allure of Chicago's Black-and-Tans handout**

Instructional Notes

If possible have students arrange their chairs in a circle. Encourage students to respond to each others' questions and ideas and let them facilitate their own discussion as much as possible.

Extension Activities

Have students read and discuss “No Seats on the Main Floor,” chapter 3 of Dempsey J. Travis’s book *An Autobiography of Black Jazz* (Chicago: Urban Research Press, 1983), which discusses the complexities of cultural integration on Chicago’s South Side in the 1920s.

Handout: The Allure of Chicago's Black-and-Tans

By William Kenney

Source: *Chicago History* magazine, volume XXVI, number 3 (fall 1997), 18-21.

Twenties jazz and the black-and-tans involved what John Szwed has called "the embodiment of culture," in which Caucasians, depending upon their interests, temporarily adopted the dance and/or the musical mannerisms of African Americans, taking on, in their own minds, the characteristics of South Side Chicagoans in ritualized, often racially stereotyped, song and dance. The musical rituals of the black-and-tan cabarets were inclusory and served to explain and interpret in an essentially reassuring manner the presence of other, exotic, and perhaps dangerous people in their midst. Polyphonic jazz in the black-and-tan cabarets of twenties Chicago suggested some of the disorder and moral confusion of contemporary city life, but it also provided reassuring harmonic and rhythmic structures that helped customers to allay their fears of modern life and interracial violence.