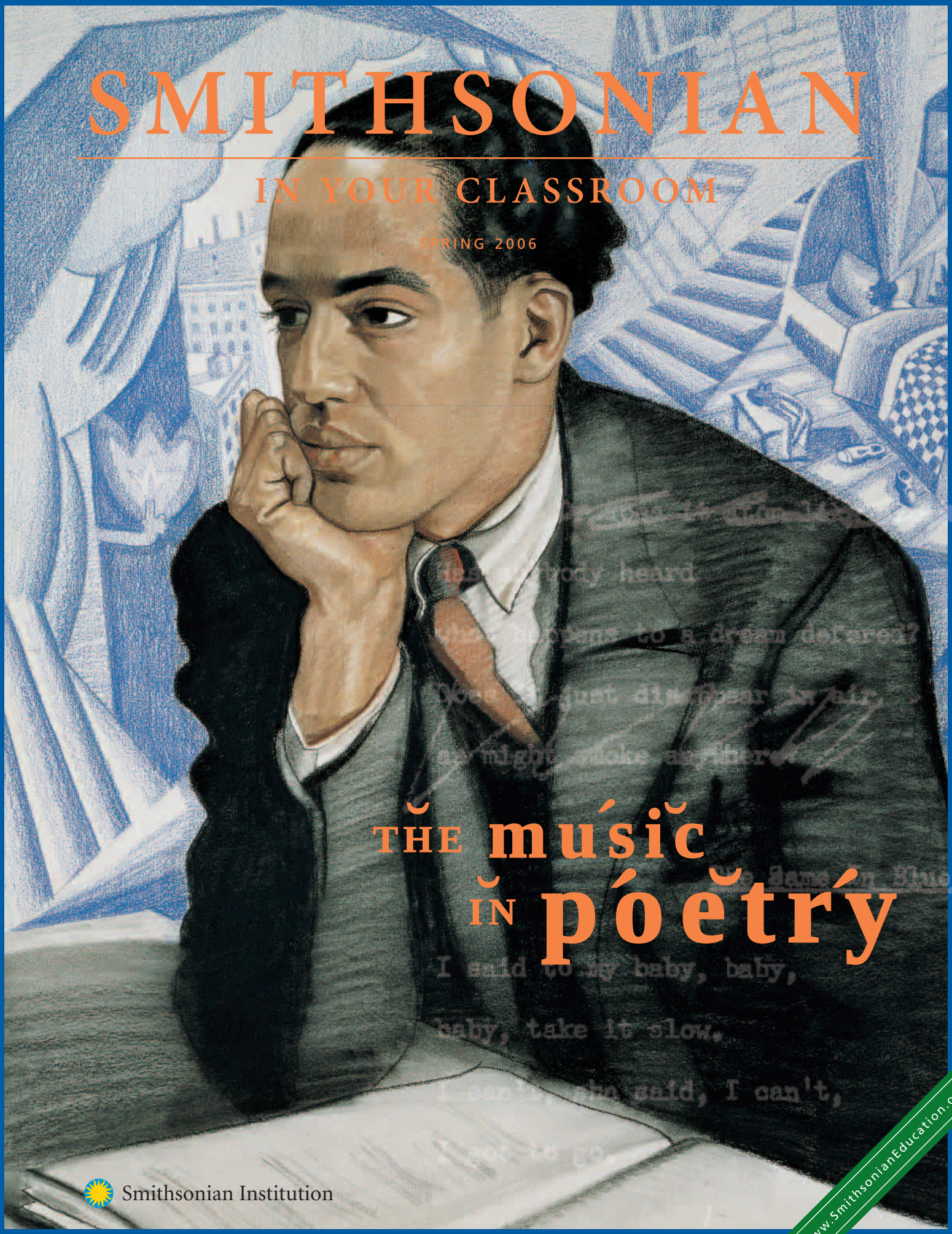

SMITHSONIAN

IN YOUR CLASSROOM

SPRING 2006

THE MUSIC IN POETRY

Smithsonian Institution

www.SmithsonianEducation.org

Contents

The lessons address the following standards:

NATIONAL LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS, GRADES K–12

Standard 6 Applying Knowledge
Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.

Standard 7 Evaluating Data
Students gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources.

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION, GRADES 5–8

Content Standard 8
Students understand relationships between music and other arts.

Content Standard 9
Students understand music in relation to history and culture.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

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Ballad Blues

The lessons in this issue introduce students to the rhythms of poetry. The focus is on two poetic forms that originated as forms of song: the BALLAD stanza, found throughout British and American literature, and the BLUES stanzas of Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes. The exercises take poetry off the page and put it into terms of movement, physical space, and, finally, music.

This is the first SMITHSONIAN IN YOUR CLASSROOM with a soundtrack. At a special Web page, www.SmithsonianGlobalSound.org/Siyc,

students can listen to musical ballads and blues from the catalog of Smithsonian Folkways Recordings. The ballads include early recordings by Bob Dylan and Suzanne Vega. The blues is heard in regional styles and as an element of early jazz.

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings was established in 1987, when the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage acquired the catalog of the New York–based company Folkways Records. For forty years, Folkways, under founder Moses Asch, recorded the music, poetry, and oral histories of people in every part of the world. Smithsonian Folkways continues to release new titles while keeping all of the Folkways works in print.

The special *Smithsonian in Your Classroom* audio page is a feature on the site Smithsonian Global Sound, launched last year to provide Internet access to more than 40,000 recordings. Music is searchable by genre, instrument, name of artist and song, and continent, country, and region of origin. There is an audio clip for every track. The tracks can be purchased individually and downloaded, most for 99¢.

If you are interested in that broadest of all musical categories, "world music," you won't find a site that's more fun to browse than Global Sound. The blues, bluegrass, cowboy songs, French chansons, Jamaican calypsos, Sicilian tarantellas, Chinese opera—it's all at one address, www.SmithsonianGlobalSound.org.

Background

Ballad

For centuries, unlettered people of Britain and America preserved an important body of early English literature: story songs, or *ballads*, which were passed along from singer to singer. Some ballads that originated in the Middle Ages are still with us, not as relics of history but as the roots of living music. Here is the opening of "Lord Randal," which probably dates from the thirteenth century:

O where hae you been, Lord Randal, my son?
And where hae you been, my handsome young man?

Here is the opening of Bob Dylan's "Hard Rain":

Oh, where have you been, my blue-eyed son?
Oh, where have you been, my darling young one?

Still with us, too, in both lyrics and printed poetry, is a common verse structure of the songs, the *ballad stanza*. In poetry, it is also called the *Chevy Chase stanza*, after a ballad that tells of a battle between the English and the Scottish.

God prosper long our noble king,
Our liffes and saftyes all!
A woefull hunting once there did
In Chevy Chase befall.

In this four-line form, or *quatrain*, the first and third lines have eight syllables; the second and fourth, the rhyming lines, have six. What we count, however, are the units of syllables, or *feet*, that make up the meter. Most verse in ballad form is made up of the *iamb*, a foot in which a stressed syllable follows a lighter syllable.

God PROS / per LONG / our NO / ble KING,
Our LIFFES / and SAF / tyes ALL!

In *scansion*, the diagramming of meter, stressed syllables are usually given accent marks. The usual symbol for unstressed syllables looks like the smile of a smiley face.


God prosper long our noble king, 4


Our liffes and saftyes all! 3


A woefull hunting once there did 4


In Chevy Chase befall. 3

The iamb is the workhorse of metrical feet, the one that best replicates conversational speech. All of the verse dialogue in Shakespeare is in iambic pentameter, lines of five iambs, in which there is space for rich poetic adornment. The ballad stanza's more limited space—iambic tetrameter followed by iambic trimeter—is well suited to a story told in simple terms. The shorter line makes the point, like a punch line, and we move on.

But the form allows for all sorts of effects. In this stanza from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," alliterations and internal rhymes give the verse the speed of the ship it is describing:

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrows followed free;
We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea.

The majority of Emily Dickinson's 1,775 poems are in ballad form or some variation of it. Dickinson squeezes some very complex ideas into those narrow lines. The verse slows down to the pace at which we read philosophy.

The brain is deeper than the sea,
For, hold them, blue to blue,
The one the other will absorb
As sponges, buckets do.

Here is the basic form in one of William Wordsworth's "lyrical ballads":

She dwelt among the untrodden ways
Beside the springs of Dove,
A Maid whom there were none to praise
And very few to love.

Wordsworth breaks up the rhythm slightly with an extra syllable in the first line. Note, too, that the longer lines also rhyme. This two-rhyme variation is sometimes called the *common measure* or *hymnal measure*. As the terms suggest, it was used for hymns, and quite commonly.

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now I'm found,
Was blind, but now I see.

The ballad stanza's lines of four and three strong beats correspond to Latin septenary verse, long lines of seven strong beats, which came to England with the Norman Conquest. When we hear the ballad stanza in modern songwriting—in the Carter Family's "Storms Are on the Ocean" or Dylan's "Shelter from the Storm" or Bruce Springsteen's "The River" or Willie Nelson's "Seven Spanish Angels" or U2's "One"—we hear a rhythm older than our language.

Blues

Another standard lyric structure in popular music is the *blues stanza*. Here, among thousands of examples, is a stanza from the Robert Johnson song "Love in Vain":

When the train left the station, was two lights on behind.
When the train left the station, was two lights on behind.
The blue light was my blues and the red light was my mind.

The three lines of the stanza—the second line repeating the first, the third line bringing home the rhyme—are usually set in twelve bars of music, in 4/4 time. While the lyrics of the blues are rarely in regular meter, the music often has a driving beat that is not unlike the heartbeat rhythm of the iamb: *da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM*.

This form, which seems to have originated in the Mississippi Delta in the nineteenth century, became an element of early New Orleans jazz—folklorist Alan Lomax likened jazz to a gumbo and the blues to the okra. And the blues was the music in the Memphis air at the advent of rock and roll.

You ain't nothin' but a hound dog, snoopin' round my door.
You ain't nothin' but a hound dog, snoopin' round my door.
You can wag your tail, but I ain't feedin' you no more.

The first to recognize the potential of the blues as written poetry was Langston Hughes, who was born in Joplin, Missouri, in 1902 and spent most of his childhood in the university town of Lawrence, Kansas. When he was eleven years old, he heard the blues coming from an orchestra of blind musicians on Independence Avenue in Kansas City. As Hughes biographer Arnold Rampersad describes it, "The music seemed to cry, but the words somehow laughed."

Hughes moved to the East in 1921 and heard the music again, in clubs on Lenox Avenue in Harlem and Seventh Street in Washington, D.C. "I tried to write poems like the songs they sang on Seventh Street," he once said. Those songs "had the pulse beat of the people who keep on going."

In his many poems in the blues form, Hughes broke the three lines into six lines, as in this stanza from "Morning After":

I said, Baby! Baby!
Please don't snore so loud.
Baby! Please!
Please don't snore so loud.
You jest a little bit o' woman but you
Sound like a great big crowd.

The line breaks give a further sense of the music, indicating where a singer might pause or drag a word across a few beats. *Baby! Pleeeeeeease!*

Until his death in 1967, Hughes brought new musical rhythms into his poetry—boogie woogie, swing, bebop, soul à la Ray Charles, free jazz. In this body of work, as in the music, the blues was the basis.

Iamb, I Am

The exercises in this lesson help students recognize a metrical unit, the iamb.

Step One

On the board, write these lines from Dr. Seuss's *Green Eggs and Ham:*

I do not like green eggs and ham.
I do not like them, Sam-I-am.

Explain to the class that we can hear beats in poetry, as we can in music, and that these beats come from the different degrees of stress that we put on syllables.

Step Two

Hold up the cover of this issue. Ask students to emulate the position that Langston Hughes is in—elbow resting on desk, chin resting on palm. As they hold the position, lead them in a slow recital of the Dr. Seuss lines.

The chin drops a bit lower on stressed syllables like *Sam* and *ham* than on relatively light syllables like *and* and *I*. Students will sense a regular rhythm as the chin presses against the palm. As they remain in the chin-cradling position, help them identify the rhythm by leading a chant of exaggerated nonsense syllables: *da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM.*

Explain that each *da-DUM*—each set of an unstressed and stressed syllable—is called an iamb. Demonstrate how iambs are represented by adding scansion marks to the lines on the board.

˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
I do not like green eggs and ham.

˘ / ˘ / ˘ ˘ / ˘ /
I do not like them, Sam-I-am.

You might point out that Sam's middle and last names, I-am, make up an iamb.

Step Three

Lead students in a chanting of the lines, using the scansion marks as a guide. Then lead a reading in which they try knocking on their desks to the rhythm. *Knock-KNOCK, knock-KNOCK.*

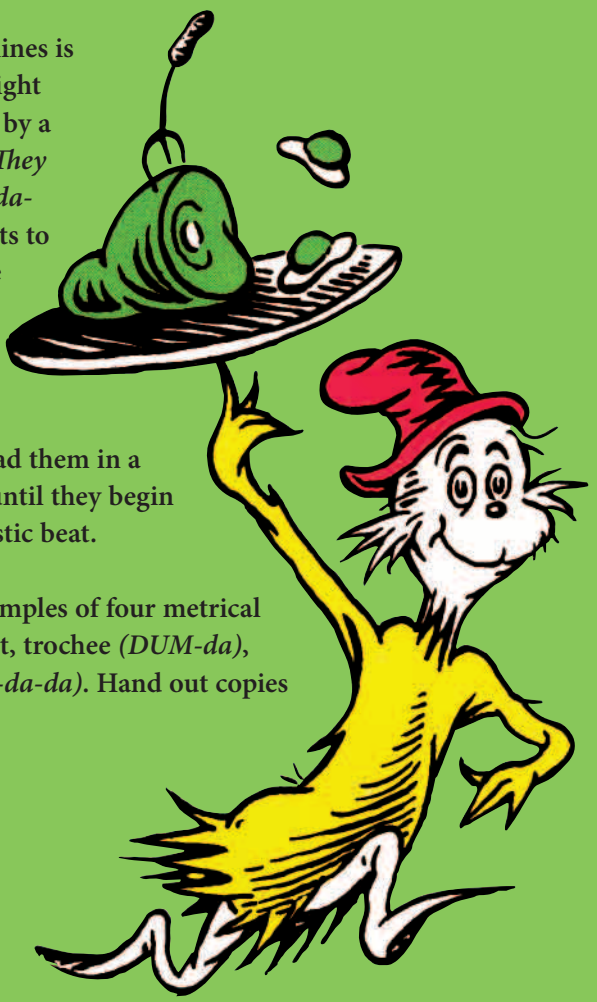
To make it clear that meter doesn't depend on a chanted pronunciation—that meter is the work of the poet rather than a speaker—lead them in a more natural reading, as if the lines were prose. Ask them to try knocking on their desks to this reading.

Step Four

Explain that an iamb is a unit of measurement, a *foot* of verse. For the sake of comparison with another kind of foot, write this Dr. Seuss couplet on the board:

They would dine on Who-pudding and rare Who-roast beast,
Which was something the Grinch couldn't stand in the least.

The foot in these lines is the *anapest*: two light syllables followed by a stressed syllable. *They would DINE. Da-da-DUM.* Ask students to try chanting these lines to the iambic beat. When they realize that the words don't fit, lead them in a knocking recital until they begin to hear the anapestic beat.



On page 7 are examples of four metrical feet: iamb, anapest, trochee *(DUM-da)*, and dactyl *(DUM-da-da)*. Hand out copies for further study.

Ballad Measures

Students now look at the ballad stanza. To better see its line lengths, they literally measure the lines in an area of the classroom. To better hear its musicality, they listen, individually or as a class, to songs in ballad form at www.SmithsonianGlobalSound.org/Siyc.

The instructions assume that the classroom floor is tiled. Students measure the lines according to numbers of tiles. If the room is not tiled, you might mark off similar distances with masking tape.

Step One

Explain that poetry has groupings of lines, or stanzas, which are somewhat similar to paragraphs in prose. Write this stanza on the board:

A ballad stanza in a poem
Has lines as long as these.
In measuring the lines, we find
We get both fours and threes.

Ask students to predict: *In this kind of stanza—the ballad stanza—what can we measure that would give us sums of four and three?*

Step Two

Ask for four volunteers who will do the following:

Each will represent one line of the stanza. The four will line up along a wall like runners at the starting blocks. As the class slowly recites the lines, each volunteer, in turn, will walk off the distance of the line, taking a step of one floor tile for each syllable. Each will hold still at the end of the line.

Their positions will look like this:

							X
					X		
							X
					X		

Draw a graph to represent the tiles. As a class, fill it in with the syllables.

A	bal	lad	stan	za	in	a	poem
Has	lines	as	long	as	these.		
In	mea	sur	ing	the	lines,	we	find
We	get	both	fours	and	threes.		

Step Three

As a class, use the chanting or knocking exercise of the first lesson to determine the meter of the stanza. When students begin to hear the iambic beat, ask again: *What can we measure that would give us fours and threes?*

When they arrive at the answer, draw a new graph to represent the lines of four and three iambs. As a class, fill it in with only the stressed syllables:

bal	stan	in	poem
lines	long	these.	
mea	ing	lines	find
get	fours	threes.	

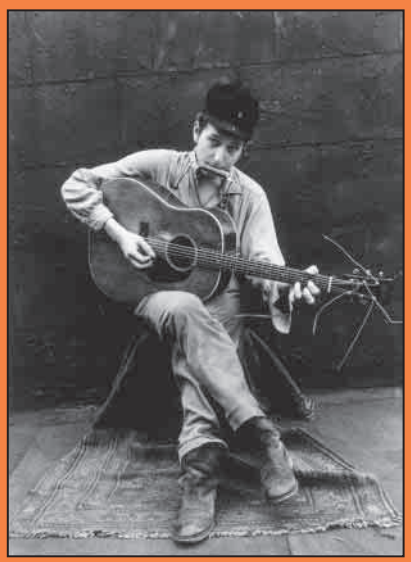
Use the graph to look for patterns in the syllables themselves. For instance, the word *lines* occurs twice and both times it is a stressed beat—it is an inherently strong syllable. But the word *in* also occurs twice and only once is it in the stressed position. Its emphasis depends on its relationship to other words, somewhat as a musical note depends on relationships to other notes.

Step Four

Explain that the ballad stanza originated in music and that it is still used for song lyrics. Syllable counts may vary a bit in songs, but the essence of the ballad form is seen in the last graph—alternating lines of four and three stressed beats. Tell students that they will now listen to examples of songs in ballad form and compare them to poems in the form.

The poems are on pages 8–9. Hand out copies. If it is possible for students to explore the audio Web page on their own, ask them to choose a poem they like and to try fitting it to one of the ballad melodies. They might listen to a chosen song several times, until they are able to separate the tune from the original lyrics, and then try singing the poem's words to the tune.

Note: Students will find a few variations on the ballad stanza among the poems as well as the songs.



Extension Ideas

•"There is no rhythm in the world without movement first," says Langston Hughes on a Smithsonian Folkways recording titled *The Rhythms of the World*, which we recommend as a delightful addition to these two lessons. Hughes connects poetic and musical rhythms to footsteps, birdcalls, ocean sounds, and even the patterns of fabrics. After students listen to the recording, you might encourage them to improvise movements to meter—a stride and a hop, for instance, for an iamb. Virginia Zimmerman of Bucknell University writes of such a kinesthetic approach to verse in an article titled "Moving Poems," published in the Fall 2002 issue of *Pedagogy*. It is available for download at libraries that subscribe to Project MUSE, an electronic collection of journals.

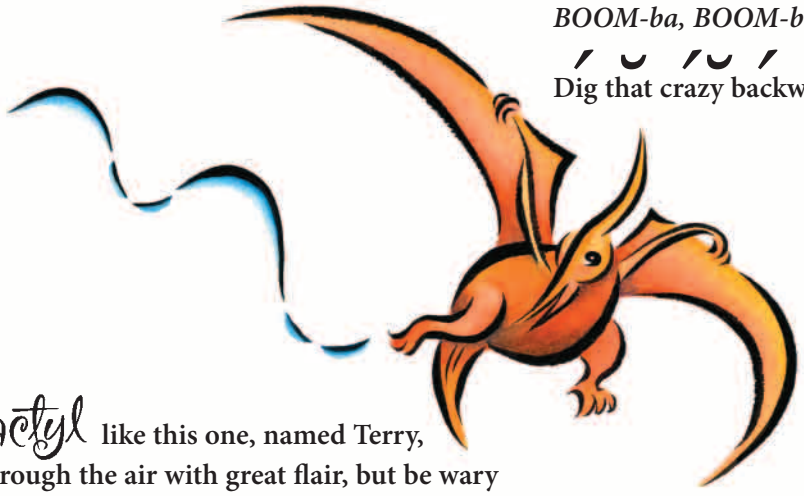
•The final step of the Lesson 2, in which each student chooses a tune for a poem, might be the basis for an explication essay. The student would defend the choice by citing ideas in the poem that correspond to the mood heard in the music. Some of the poems allow for a range of interpretations, and thus a range of music. In Wordsworth's "I Traveled Among Unknown Men," the traveler is certainly happy to be home, but is it a happy poem? Is there more sadness than humor in A. E. Housman's "Oh, When I Was in Love with You"? Is Emily Dickinson writing of hopelessness or hope?

•If students go on to write poems in ballad form, they will have an experience that musical composers know—the expression of feeling within mathematical rules. We welcome student poems at **learning@si.edu**. We'll post as many as we can at the Web site **www.SmithsonianEducation.org**.

A Bestiary of Poetic Terms

The iamb's tread across a line
Can sound a bit like yours or mine
˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
If we went stomping through a room
In just one shoe: *ba-BOOM, ba-BOOM.*

This strange creature, called the trochee,
One time, in a hokey-pokey,
Got himself all turned around,
Took some steps, and liked the sound.
BOOM-ba, BOOM-ba, went his feet.
/ ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
Dig that crazy backward beat!



Sometimes a dactyl like this one, named Terry,
Will fly through the air with great flair, but be wary
Of standing right under a dactyl in flight.
Though he is flapping with all of his might,
Terry is carrying weighty words with him.
/ ˘ ˘ / ˘ ˘ /
Beats such as these can be termed
fall
ing rhythm.

It's a poetry party! Let's *all* cut a rug!
The contagiously musical anapest bug
Is now setting the beat: *biz-biz-BUZZ, biz-biz-BUZZ.*
If you follow her lead, if you do as she does,
You'll be dancing past midnight and dancing till dawn.
You'll be dancing long after the anapest's gone.
You'll be boogying still while she's snug in her bed,
˘ ˘ / ˘ ˘ / ˘ ˘ / ˘ ˘ /
'Cause you can't get this buggy beat out of your head!

...biz biz Buzz...

Illustrations by Sandy Haight. Calligraphy by Iskra Johnson.

Lesson 2 Poems

From THE WHITE KNIGHT'S SONG

Lewis Carroll

I'll tell thee everything I can:
There's little to relate.
I saw an agèd, agèd man,
A-sitting on a gate.

"Who are you, agèd man?" I said.
"And how is it you live?"
And his answer trickled through my head,
Like water through a sieve.
He said, "I look for butterflies
That sleep among the wheat:
I make them into mutton-pies,
And sell them in the street.
I sell them unto men," he said,
"Who sail on stormy seas:

And that's the way I get my bread—
A trifle, if you please."

I MANY TIMES THOUGHT PEACE HAD COME

Emily Dickinson

I many times thought peace had come,
When peace was far away;
As wrecked men deem they sight the land
At centre of the sea,

And struggle slacker, but to prove,
As hopelessly as I,
How many the fictitious shores
Before the harbor lie.

I TRAVELED AMONG UNKNOWN MEN

William Wordsworth

I traveled among unknown men,
In lands beyond the sea;
Nor, England! did I know till then
What love I bore to thee.

'Tis past, that melancholy dream!
Nor will I quit thy shore
A second time; for still I seem
To love thee more and more.

Among thy mountains did I feel
The joy of my desire;
And she I cherished turned her wheel
Beside an English fire.

Thy mornings showed, thy nights concealed,
The bowers where Lucy played;
And thine too is the last green field
That Lucy's eyes surveyed.

OH, WHEN I WAS IN LOVE WITH YOU

A. E. Housman

Oh, when I was in love with you,
Then I was clean and brave,
And miles around the wonder grew
How well did I behave.

And now the fancy passes by,
And nothing will remain,
And miles around they'll say that I
Am quite myself again.

THE HALF-MOON WESTERS LOW, MY LOVE

A. E. Housman

The half-moon westers low, my love,
And the wind brings up the rain;
And wide apart lie we, my love,
And seas between the twain.

I know not if it rains, my love,
In the land where you do lie;
And, oh, so sound you sleep, my love,
You know no more than I.

westers, moves westward

Lesson 3

The Blues and Langston Hughes

The blues poetry of Langston Hughes is closely connected to its musical source. Music, therefore, is used throughout this lesson. The map on pages 12–13 is a guide to the blues at www.SmithsonianGlobalSound/Siyc.

Step One

Read aloud this children's poem by Langston Hughes, "The Blues":

When the shoe strings break
On both *your shoes*
And you're in a hurry—
That's the blues.

When you go to buy a candy bar
And you've lost the dime you had—
Slipped through a hole in your pocket somewhere
That's the blues, too, and bad!

Now play for students the song "Good Morning Blues" by Lead Belly. In a class discussion, consider how the song is in keeping with Hughes's definition of the blues. *Does the song tell of trouble? Is it entirely sad? Is it also humorous? Is Hughes's poem humorous?*

Step Two

Hand out copies of page 11, which contains two Hughes poems in blues form, "Homesick Blues" and "Young Gal's Blues." Ask students to apply what they have learned about stanzas to look for a stanza structure in these poems.

When they begin to identify the structure—the repetition of the first statement, the rhyme on the third statement—play "Good Morning Blues" again. Ask them to listen for this form in the song.

Step Three

Call attention to the beat of "Good Morning Blues," which can be enunciated as the iambic *da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM*. Ask students to clap along, or rap on their desks, until they get the hang of the beat.

Now lead a recital of "Homesick Blues" or "Young Gal's Blues" in which students speak the words as they clap or tap out the musical beat. They might also try singing the poem to the tune of one of the blues songs on the audio page.

Step Four

If possible, allow students to explore the blues on the audio page on their own while using copies of pages 12–13 as a guide. Now familiar with the blues stanza, they will be able to recognize the blues roots of many musical styles. They will hear, too, a range of lyrical material: jokes, stories, laments for love lost, celebrations of love found. Ask them to try composing a blues stanza, keeping one of the tunes in mind. Encourage a free expression by letting them know that nearly anything can be made into a blues. Even *Green Eggs and Ham.*

I never liked green eggs, always hated green ham, too.
Never liked green eggs, always hated green ham, too.
Go away, Sam-I-am, your green eggs are turning me blue.

We encourage you to send the work to learning@si.edu. We'll post as many poems as we can at www.SmithsonianEducation.org.

HOMESICK BLUES

De railroad bridge's
A sad song in de air.
De railroad bridge's
A sad song in de air.
Ever time de train pass
I wants to go somewhere.

I went down to de station.
Ma heart was in ma mouth.
I went down to de station.
Ma heart was in ma mouth.
Lookin' for a box car
To roll me to de South.

Homesick blues, Lawd.
'Sa terrible thing to have.
Homesick blues is
A terrible thing to have.
To keep from cryin'
I opens ma mouth an laughs.

YOUNG GAL'S BLUES

I'm gonna walk to the graveyard
'Hind ma friend Miss Cora Lee.
Gonna walk to the graveyard
'Hind ma dear friend Cora Lee
Cause when I'm dead some
Body'll have to walk behind me.

I'm goin' to the po' house
To see ma old Aunt Clew.
Goin' to the po' house
To see ma old Aunt Clew.
When I'm old an' ugly
I'll want to see somebody, too.

The po' house is lonely
An' the grave is cold.
O, the po' house is lonely,
The graveyard grave is cold.
But I'd rather be dead than
To be ugly an' old.

When love is gone what
Can a young gal do?
When love is gone, O,
What can a young gal do?
Keep on a-lovin' me, daddy,
Cause I don't want to be blue.

THE blues AND LANGSTON hughes

5. CHICAGO

The majority of African Americans who left Mississippi during the "Great Migration" went to Chicago. Among them were many Delta blues musicians. Big Joe Williams sings of a Delta man gone north in BLUEBIRD BLUES.

In Chicago, the blues changed in many ways. Listen to Delta-born pianist Roosevelt Sykes play in the Chicago "boogie woogie" style on SWEET OLD CHICAGO. Is this the tempo of the country or the city? The Chambers Brothers do OH BABY, YOU DON'T HAVE TO GO, by Mississippi-born Chicago musician Jimmy Reed. Is this blues or rock and roll? Or is it both?

3. KANSAS CITY

Langston Hughes, born in 1902, spent much of his childhood in Lawrence, Kansas. When he was eleven years old he went to Kansas City, Missouri, and heard a blues singer for the first time. A swinging style of jazz would later come out of Kansas City. Listen for the blues roots of this music in three songs called KANSAS CITY.

1. MISSISSIPPI DELTA

The Delta region of Mississippi is a cotton-growing plain between the Mississippi and Yazoo rivers, in the northwestern part of the state. Most of the great blues musicians of the twentieth century, from Robert Johnson to B. B. King, were born in Delta towns or on Delta cotton plantations just a few miles from each other. Listen to Furry Lewis playing slide guitar on PEARLEE BLUES. The "slide" is a bottleneck pressed along the strings to produce this voice-like wailing sound, a hallmark of early Delta blues.

2. NEW ORLEANS

Like the city where it was born, New Orleans, jazz is a mixture of elements from many places, including the Delta. The Kid Clayton recording of CORRINE CORRINA is a good example of the richness of early New Orleans jazz—joyous and mournful, sophisticated and ragged, sleepy-sounding and military-sounding all at the same time. Can you hear the blues in this music?

at www.SmithsonianGlobalSound.org/Siyc

4. NEW YORK

Hughes went to New York in 1921 to attend Columbia University. At the time, the nearby neighborhood of Harlem was becoming a center for African American artists. In Harlem, Hughes met the blues again. He describes such an encounter in THE WEARY BLUES. Can you find the blues stanza in the poem?

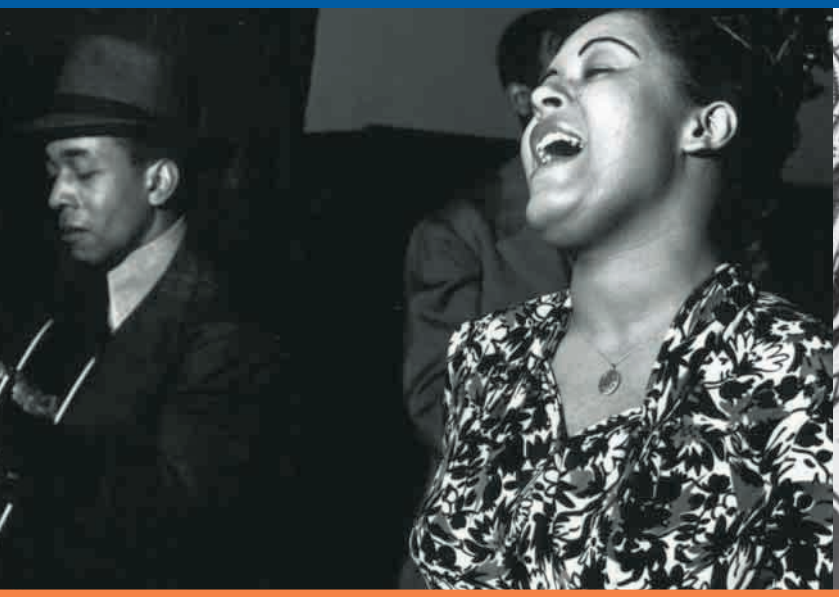
GRAYSOM STREET BLUES by Margaret Johnson is the kind of music Hughes might have heard in the East. It was recorded in New York in 1926, the height of the "Harlem Renaissance."

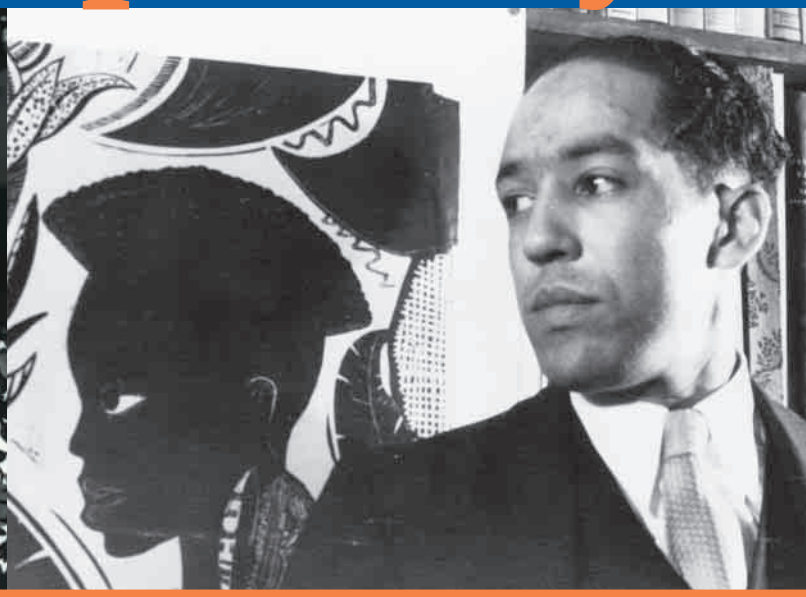
The origins of the blues are mysterious enough to have a mythology. The most famous myth is that Robert Johnson, a blues artist who recorded in the 1930s, once met the devil at a lonely crossroads in the Mississippi Delta. Johnson sold his soul for his talent, as the story goes, and from that deal came a vocal and guitar style that musicians have been trying and failing to imitate ever since.

Like most myths, the crossroads story has something in it that's true. The blues, as we know it, was born in the Mississippi Delta, and out of that narrow corner of the South, out of the heartfelt songs of working people, came much of the world's popular music.

You can follow the journey by listening to the blues at www.SmithsonianGlobalSound.org/Siyc. Begin with Langston Hughes's version of THE STORY OF THE BLUES.

THE MUSIC IN POETRY





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