Ragtime, Blues, and Early Jazz
VOCABULARY TERMS

jazz  A musical style created mainly by African Americans in early twentieth century that blended elements drawn from African music with the popular and art traditions of the West.

ragtime  Late-nineteenth-century piano style created by African Americans, characterized by highly syncopated melodies; also played in ensemble arrangements. Contributed to early jazz styles.

strain  A series of contrasting sections found in rags and marches; in duple meter with sixteen-measure themes or sections.

blues  African-American form of secular folk music, related to jazz, that is based on a simple, repetitive poetic-musical structure.

blue note  A slight drop of pitch on the third, fifth, or seventh tone of the scale, common in blues and jazz. Also bent pitch.

scat singing  A jazz style that sets syllables without meaning (vocables) to an improvised vocal line.

tocable  Nonlexical syllables, lacking literal meaning.

chorus  Fairly large group of singers who perform together, usually with several on each part. Also a choral movement of a large-scale work. In jazz, a single statement of the melodic-harmonic pattern.

improvisation  Creation of a musical composition while it is being performed, seen in Baroque ornamentation, cadenzas of concertos, jazz, and some non-Western musics.

syncopated  Deliberate upsetting of the meter or pulse through a temporary shifting of the accent to a weak beat or an offbeat.

art music  A catch-all term for any music that was enjoyed by a smaller crowd; this included operas and “classical” type music.

opera  Music drama that is generally sung throughout, combining the resources of vocal and instrumental music with poetry and drama, acting and pantomime, scenery and costumes.

symphony  Large work for orchestra, generally in three or four movements.

strophe  Song structure in which the same music is repeated with every stanza (strophe) of the poem.

spiritual  Folk-like devotional genre of the United States, sung by African Americans and whites.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>work song</strong></th>
<th>Communal song that synchronized group tasks.</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>shouts</strong></td>
<td>An early African-American ritual that involved singing, dancing, and “shouting” praises to God.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>polyphonic</strong></td>
<td>Two or more melodic lines combined into a multi-voiced texture.</td>
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<td><strong>countermelody</strong></td>
<td>An accompanying melody sounded against the principal melody.</td>
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<td><strong>fantasias</strong></td>
<td>Free instrumental piece of fairly large dimensions, in an improvisational style.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>call-and-response</strong></td>
<td>Performance style with a singing leader who is imitated by a chorus of followers.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>griot</strong></td>
<td>A West African storyteller and/or praise singer who led call-and-response type singing.</td>
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Ragtime, Blues, & Early Jazz
RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT

Compose a one-page report (handwritten) on five (5) out of the following (10) musicians:

Scott Joplin
Robert Johnson
Charlie Patton
Louis Armstrong
Ella Fitzgerald
Benny Goodman
Count Basie
Billie Holiday
Artie Shaw
BB King
**Ragtime, Blues, and Early Jazz**

**KEY POINTS**

*All riddles are blues,*
*And all blues are sad,*
*And I’m only mentioning*
*Some blues I’ve had.*

-MAYA ANGELOU

- *Jazz* arised in the early twentieth century and drew elements from African traditions and from Western popular and art culture.

- Its roots are in West African music (including call-and-response singing) and in nineteenth-century African-American ceremonial and work songs.

- *Ragtime* developed from an African-American piano style characterized by syncopated rhythms and sectional forms.

- Scott Joplin, often considered the “king of ragtime,” is the first African-American composer to win international fame; he is remembered for his piano rags, especially *Maple Leaf Rag*.

- Louis Armstrong is one of the great early jazz performers (on trumpet); he also introduced *scat singing* (singing on syllables without meaning).

- Armstrong was first associated with *New Orleans-style jazz*, which is characterized by a small ensemble of players improvising simultaneously.

- *Blues* is an American genre of folk music based on a simple, repetitive, poetic-musical form with three-line strophes set to a repeating harmonic pattern of twelve bars.

- Billie Holiday is one of the leading female jazz singers, and was a composer as well.

- Ragtime, blues, and jazz are rooted in the music of African-Americans. These musical styles are part of the great American identity, and have captured the imagination of the world.
Ragtime, Blues, and Early Jazz
UNIT OUTLINE

1. Jazz is a 20th-century American musical style

Drew from African traditions and traditions from the West, began in New Orleans

Roots of jazz are in West African music (call-and-response), and 19th-century African-American ceremonial and work songs

Ragtime, a precursor to jazz, developed from African-American piano style characterized by syncopated rhythms and sectional forms

2. Scott Joplin (1868–1917) and Ragtime

American Composer

"The king of ragtime"

Joplin and ragtime gained notice during a performance at the 1893 World Exposition (Chicago)

Left St. Louis for Chicago, then went to New York

Active in New York as teacher, composer, performer

Sought to elevate ragtime to a serious art form

After poorly received opera premiere (Treemonisha), fell into period of depression

Died in New York in 1917

Revival of Treemonisha in 1972 earned Joplin a posthumous Pulitzer Prize

Some of his piano rags are preserved on recordings made by Joplin on Steinway player piano rolls

3. Joplin: Maple Leaf Rag (Listening Guide)

Regular sectional form

Four strains, each repeated

Syncopated rhythms
4. Blues and New Orleans Jazz

Blues: an American form of folk music based on a simple, repetitive, poetic-musical structure

The term refers to a mood as well as harmonic progression

Harmonic progression is usually 12 (or 16) bars in length

Characteristic is the blue note (slight drop in pitch)

Blues texts typically consist of a 3-line stanza, the first 2 lines are the same

Vocal style derived from work songs

The art of improvisation is critical in blues

5. Louis Armstrong (1901–1971) and Early Jazz

American musician (cornet and trumpet)

Nickname "Satchmo"

Success in Chicago with the New Orleans–style ensemble King Oliver Creole Jazz Band

Great improviser

Used variety of mutes to expand capacities of trumpet in range and tone color

Recording of Heebie Jeebies introduced scat singing (syllables without literal meaning)

Jazz chorus is a single statement of a melodic-harmonic pattern

Armstrong introduced solo rather than ensemble choruses

Style influenced generations of musicians
6. The Jazz Singer Billie Holiday (1915–1959)

American blues and jazz singer

Nickname “Lady Day”

Tragic childhood

Discovered by talent scout, sent to record with Benny Goodman

Sang with the top jazz musicians of her day

Life deteriorated into drug and alcohol abuse

Died at 44 from cirrhosis of the liver

Recognizable singing style


Recorded with Artie Shaw on clarinet and Bunny Berigan on trumpet

12-bar blues

Short introduction and six choruses

Begins with 3-line strophe, but becomes freer

Demonstrates her masterful rhythmic flexibility
Jazz has been viewed by many as a truly American art form, but in reality it draws together traditions from West Africa, Europe, and the Americas.

The African origins of jazz evoke an earlier episode of American history: the slave trade from Africa.

Many of the slaves brought to America came from the west coast of Africa often called the Ivory or Gold Coast.

It is not surprising, then, that studies comparing the musical traditions in sub-Saharan Africa with those in certain isolated regions of black America have confirmed many similarities.

These include singing styles (call-and-response patterns and various vocal inflections) and storytelling techniques, traits that have remained alive for several centuries in both regions through oral tradition.

Black music in nineteenth-century America included dancing for ritual and ceremonial purposes and the singing of work songs (communal songs that synchronized the rhythm of group tasks) and spirituals (a kind of religious folk song, often with a refrain).

West African religious traditions mingled freely with the Protestant Christianity adopted by some slaves.

The art of storytelling through music, typical of many West African tribes, and praise singing (glorifying deities or royalty) were other traditions retained by slaves that would contribute to spirituals and blues.

Although both men and women took part in praise singing – either could lead call-and-response ceremonial songs – the musical storyteller, called the griot, was traditionally a male, whose mission it was to preserve and transmit the history, stories, and poetry of the people.

The city of New Orleans fueled the early sounds of jazz.

There in Congo Square, slaves met in the pre-Civil War era to dance to the accompaniment of all sorts of instruments, including drums, gourds, mouth harps, and banjos.

Their music featured a strong underlying pulse over which syncopations and polyrhythmic elaborations took place.

Melodies incorporated African-derived techniques such as rhythmic interjections, vocal glides, and percussive sounds made with the tongue and throat and were often set in musical scale with blue notes.

The Bamboula, danced in Congo Square, New Orleans, to the accompaniment of drums and singing, according to artist E.V. Kemble in 1885

In the years after the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation (1863), a new style of music arose in the South, especially in the Mississippi Delta – country, or rural, blues, performed by a raspy-voiced male singer and, by the turn of the century, accompanied by a steel-string guitar.

This music voiced the difficulties of everyday life in a continuation of the storyteller, or griot, tradition.

The vocal lines featured melodic pitch bending, or blue notes, sung over repeated bass patterns.
Among the greatest blues singers were Charlie Patton (1891-1934) and the legendary B.B. King.

Dance music also flourished among Southern blacks, and one type in particular, ragtime, strongly influenced early jazz.

Ragtime was the first African-American music to experience widespread popularity.

This catchy style was soon heard across the country and in Europe, both as accompanied song and as solo piano music; we have already learned of Scott Joplin’s important contribution to this genre.

The rhythmic vitality of ragtime fascinated European and American composers alike.

We will hear shortly how George Gershwin and Leonard Bernstein infused their music with expressive elements of blues and jazz.
Ragtime, Blues, and Early Jazz
LISTENING GUIDE

**Joplin: Maple Leaf Rag**

DATE OF WORK: Published 1899

GENRE: Piano Rag

PERFORMANCE: Piano roll of Joplin performing on a 1910 Steinway player piano

FORM: Sectional form; 4 sections or strains with repeats

TEMPO: Tempo di Marcia; 2/4 meter

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR: Catchy syncopated melodies (right hand) accompanied by steady, duple-meter rhythm in (left hand)
Sectional form, with four 16-measure phrases, each repeated (A-A-B-A-C-C-D-D)
Rolled or arpeggiated chords as decorative embellishments

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**Holiday: Billie’s Blues**

DATE OF WORK: Recorded 1936

PERFORMERS: Billie Holiday, vocal
Bunny Berigan, trumpet
Artie Shaw, clarinet
Joe Bushkin, piano
Dick McDonough, guitar
Pete Peterson, string bass
Cozy Cole, drums

FORM: 12-bar blues (introduction & 6 choruses)

TEMPO: Slow blues; 4/4 meter

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR: Repeated harmonic progression, heard 6 times
Steady rhythm section keeps the beat under improvisations; slow, languid tempo with syncopated rhythms
First vocal chorus has typical blues text; others are more free
Differing improvisational styles of 3 featured soloists; Holiday (voice), Shaw (clarinet), and Berigan (trumpet)
Pitch inflections (bent notes, blue notes, and scoops) typical of blues
**Ragtime, Blues, and Early Jazz**

**STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. Describe the verses of *Billie’s Blues*. Which verse has a typical blues text?
2. Explain how ragtime got its name.
3. What city is considered the birthplace of Jazz?
4. What work caused Scott Joplin to become famous?
5. Discuss the form of *Billie’s Blues*.
6. Describe the form of a typical blues text.
7. What two instrumental solos were used in *Billie’s Blues*?
8. Name the jazz greats with which Billie Holiday sang.
9. Discuss the form of a rag.
10. Name the typical features of typical blues song.
11. For what work was Scott Joplin awarded the Pulitzer Prize posthumously?
12. Explain how Billie Holiday made history.
13. Name the most important element of ragtime.
14. Who was one of the first African-American composers to receive wide recognition?
15. Discuss how early jazz came to be.
16. Who is credited for the invention of scat singing?
17. Define “blue note.”
18. Discuss the success of Joplin’s *Treemonisha*.
19. What is Scott Joplin’s nickname?
20. How did Joplin “record” his rags?
21. Define “ragtime.”

**Study all vocabulary terms.**

**Study listening guides.**

**Study the “cultural perspective” of jazz.**