



Louisiana Musical Legends

Bringing Louisiana Musicians into the Classroom

a project of the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities and 64 Parishes presented in partnership with First Lady Donna Edwards and the Louisiana Regional Arts Councils

Kenny Neal

Instructional Plan

Lesson Plan Author:

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Target Grade Level:

9th-10th Grade

Regional Arts Council Partner:

Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge

Notes from Lesson Plan Author:

Before planning the lesson featured here, I spoke with educational colleagues and friends to see what they knew about Kenny Neal and his family's musicianship. From there, I immersed myself in his music, listening for both pleasure and meaning. My favorite songs in both melody and message were "Blues Leave Me Alone," "The Son I Never Knew," and of course the Grammy-nominated song "Bloodline."

In my research, I discovered that I am a lot like Kenny Neal. My "Bloodline" and roots in New Orleans are steeped in musical traditions. My family sings and plays gospel music. Both of my grandfathers were pastors, and my mom and dad were both church musicians, writers, and vocalists. The apple didn't fall far from the tree for me and my siblings, because we all can sing and play multiple instruments. This connection was very exciting.

I left my research with lingering questions about the stories in Neal's music, the stories behind the stories that he shares in his music, the stories in blues music in general and the potential for students to create their own stories set to the blues.

Resources

As I prepared this instructional plan, the following resources helped broaden my own understanding of Kenny Neal's music and the history of the blues.

- 64 Parishes' article "[Blues Music](#)" and those about individual blues musicians
- [Interview with Kenny Neal](#) at University of Arkansas Pryor Center for Oral History
- Neal's [personal website](#)
- Music on Spotify and YouTube by Kenny Neal and other blues performers

Instructional Outline	
Grades:	9th-10th grade
Focus:	<p>Using Narrative Writing</p> <p>As Kenny Neal uses the blues to express his experiences in the world and his perceptions of them, the focus of this instructional plan will be to fully engage students in this same process. Students who participate in this lesson will use narrative writing and its attributes to create effective prose.</p>
Content Areas:	English Language Arts
Overview:	Students will understand blues songs as examples of narrative and generate their own narratives in a blues style.
Objectives:	As a result of this exploration, students will create a narrative about a specific event, issue, cultural or familial subject of significance and/or salience. In effect, students will use the example of Kenny Neal’s “Bloodline” to create their own narratives using the “blues” genre to set these stories to music. To differentiate this assignment, students may audio and/or video record it and perform it.
Curricular Alignment:	<p>Student learning will address the following standards:</p> <p>Common Core/Louisiana Language Arts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3.a: Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events. ▪ CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3.b: Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3.c: Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole. ▪ CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3.d: Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters. ▪ CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3.e: Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.7 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment
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<p>Activity 1: The Power of Narrative Duration: 20-25 minutes</p> <p>The term “narrative” is often used synonymously with the term “story.” Examples of narrative types or genres include non-fiction, fiction, biographies, autobiographies, fables, television sitcoms, soap operas, parables, oral traditions, and documentaries. Narratives can also be told in different formats, from traditional texts or plays to social media, blogs, videos, and music.</p> <p>As a means of engagement, the teacher will ask students to turn and talk to their neighbor using the phrase “once upon a time” to begin a narrative, real or imagined, about a particular event or important person in their lives. The teacher will give students “think time” to gather a specific idea about a specific person or event and then release students to complete this brief, 5-minute activity.</p>	<p>Materials & Resources:</p> <p>PowerPoint</p> <p>Samples of narratives</p> <p>Video clips</p>
<p>Activity 2: Exploring the Blues Duration: 20-25 minutes</p> <p>Music can take listeners on a narrative journey, both through the lyrics and through the melody. Some stories tell history, some describe the issues of the present, and some offer projections for the future. Every genre of music communicates this way; this lesson specifically focuses on the blues.</p>	<p>Materials & Resources:</p> <p>Blues audio samples, such as “Cotton Belt Blues” and “Sweet Home”</p>

<p>The blues began as a 19th-century musical form on Southern plantations among enslaved people, their descendants, and African-American sharecroppers. This musical style evolved from African spirituals, chants, hymns, work songs, and early versions of country music.</p> <p>A misconception about blues music is that it only describes adversity, misfortune, and self-pity. Blues music also contains resilience and triumph and can be seen as a catharsis, allowing performers and listeners to express and experience pain in a productive way.</p> <p>Building on the earlier activity, the teacher will ask students to complete a “quick write” on the person or event that he/she discussed in activity 1 with a neighbor. In this portion of the activity, students will be asked to quickly brainstorm characteristics of this person (strength, intelligence, perseverance etc.) or key information about the event in order to create a one-sentence theme.</p>	<p>Chicago”</p>
<p>Activity 3: Introduction to Kenny Neal and “Bloodline” Duration: 30 minutes</p> <p>Kenny Neal began playing the harmonica at age 3 and now also plays piano, guitar, bass, and blues harp. He began playing in his father Raful Neal’s band at age 13 and began playing professionally by 17. Neal has acted on Broadway and received a 2017 Grammy nomination for the 2016 song “Bloodline.”</p> <p>Watch the music video for “Bloodline” and discuss Kenny Neal’s bloodline as described in the lyrics. What is Kenny Neal telling us? How does he describe his lineage’s influence on who he is today? What does the phrase “the apple didn’t fall too far from the tree” mean? Where did the expression come from? Discuss the visual images in the video. How do the scenes support the lyrics and music? What is Kenny Neal showing us?</p> <p>Use the narrative elements chart to chart out the characters, setting, plot, point of view, theme, and any potential conflict in the narrative of “Bloodline.”</p>	<p>Materials & Resources:</p> <p>“Bloodline” video and lyrics</p> <p>Narrative elements chart</p>
<p>Activity 4: I’ve Got the Blues Duration: 60 minutes</p> <p>Students will create their own narratives about a specific event, issue, cultural, or familial subject they find significant. In effect, students will use the example of Kenny Neal’s “Bloodline” to create lyrics to their own blues song. Those who wish may record and/or perform their songs.</p>	<p>Materials & Resources:</p> <p>Rubric for analysis</p>
<p>Activity 5: Extension</p>	

To create opportunities for more research and learning, students will choose an impactful family member, political figure, teacher, or other personally important figure to interview. Students will present this person’s narrative in biographical form in a traditional essay, blog, or video.	
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About the Louisiana Musical Legends Project

The **Louisiana Musical Legends** project is the first in a series of “Aunt Dorothy’s Teacher Toolkits” developed by the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities to showcase new and engaging tools for teaching core curriculum concepts through the lens of Louisiana’s culture. Made possible through the generous support of retired music teacher Dorothy Hanna in partnership with First Lady of Louisiana Donna Edwards and the nine regional Louisiana arts councils, each Louisiana Musical Legends unit includes a brief musician biography, an educator-created lesson plan, and an original musician-focused video—all designed for classroom use. Featured musicians hail from across the state and include Luther Gray and Bamboula 2000 (Greater New Orleans), Nellie Lutcher (Southwest Louisiana), Tony Joe White (Northeast Louisiana), Amanda Shaw (Northshore), Susan Aysen (Bayou Parishes), Kenny Neal (Greater Baton Rouge), Little Walter (Central Louisiana), Leadbelly (Northwest Louisiana), and Nathan Williams Jr. (Acadiana).

