

## Playing 12-bar Blues in the General Music Classroom

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Students in all levels K-8 are able to play the roots of the blues on any pitched instrument. It is easy for them to learn since the form uses only three chords: I-IV-V7. Students are also able to transpose into multiple keys and play along. First, you must know the basic 12-bar blues form as follows:

### 12-bar blues form chord changes

_____	I	-	IV	-	I	-	I
	IV	-	IV	-	I	-	I
	V7	-	IV	-	I	-	I

### Key of C: 12-bar blues form chord changes

	C	-	F	-	C	-	C
	F	-	F	-	C	-	C
	G7	-	F	-	C	-	C

### The Process:

- 1) Introduce 12-bar blues as a “form” in music such as AABA or Rondo form.
- 2) Explain the form as a “pattern.”

Elementary students are well aware of the term, especially in their math classes. (\*For younger kids, you may also use traditional numbers.)
- 2) Ask “What do you notice in the pattern?”

They will generally note the similarity of the chords as seen vertically.
- 3) Indicate there are only three (3) chords that are used in the form. (Easy, right?!)
- 4) Explain that the numbers represent the placement of the note in a scale.

Go on to explain more as you feel is appropriate for the level of your class.
- 4) Sing a “C” scale on numbers: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-1
- 5) Sing a “C” scale on pitch letters: C-D-E-F-G-A-B-C
- 6) Play a “C” scale on a pitched instrument, if possible.
- 7) Help students to identify the I-IV-V7 chords that will be used.

\*Note: for the youngest kids, you may omit the “7” from the V chord as it tends to be too confusing for them. Since you are playing roots only, the “7” will not make a difference.
- 7) Sing the chord changes on the chord numbers, then on the letters.
- 8) Play the chord changes on pitched instruments.

Barred instruments, keyboards, recorders, steel drums, etc.

- 9) Transpose into other keys: C, D, E, G, A will all work on “C” instruments.
- 10) Repeat the process. Sing first, then play.

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