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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V7</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key of C: 12-bar blues form chord changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G7</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.)
3) Ask “What do you notice in the pattern?”
   They will generally note the similarity of the chords as seen vertically.
4) Indicate there are only three (3) chords that are used in the form. (Easy, right?!)
5) 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.
6) Sing a “C” scale on numbers: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-1
7) Sing a “C” scale on pitch letters: C-D-E-F-G-A-B-C
8) Play a “C” scale on a pitched instrument, if possible.
9) 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.
10) Sing the chord changes on the chord numbers, then on the letters.
11) 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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