

DISCOVER BLUEGRASS: Exploring American Roots Music

Unit 1: Bluegrass Today – “ADOPT A BAND”

Compared to many forms of popular music, most bluegrass bands make every effort to interact with their fans on and off stage. It is not uncommon for fans to think of bands they like, almost as family. This warm connection is an important factor in the popularity and pleasure of bluegrass music. In the lesson, learners will explore the multitude of bluegrass performers by using websites and written communication skills to establish connections.

Typical standards addresses:

Letter writing
Internet Use

Things you will need:

Internet Access

Procedure:

In this activity, teams of two or three will adopt a bluegrass band of their very own. To do that:

1. Google “bluegrass bands” “bluegrass events” to look for interesting groups. You may also find bands mentioned at www.bluegrasstoday.com, www.bluegrassmusic.com, www.cybergrass.com, <http://bluegrassmusicprofiles.com>, <http://prescriptionbluegrass.com>, <http://acousticana.us/>, www.bluegrassmuseum.org, www.facebook.com, <http://twitter.com>, www.pandora.com, www.itunes.com, www.amazon.com, www.cdbaby.com, www.theboot.com, www.pastemagazine.com, <http://pitchfork.com>, www.nodepression.com, www.siriusxm.com, www.spotify.com, www.ebma.org, www.waynerice.com/bgbios/, www.ibma.org and www.bluegrassnation.com.
2. Go through the listings and “shop” for a band. Choose one with a website. Sometimes the name of the band is part of the web address. You might want to find a band from your state or region.
3. Once you have found a band you like, explore the site to answer questions like:
 - The members of the band
 - Where they live
 - Places they have played
 - The source of the band’s name
 - CDs, EPs, digital singles or videos they have released
 - Information about their families
 - Anything else that interests you about them
4. Put the information in the form of a report that you will share with your teacher, who will then display it with the reports gathered from other teams on other bands.
5. Next, using email, Facebook or postal mail, contact the group. Ask a question, tell them about your project or comment on the information in their website.
6. Bluegrass bands are usually responsive to fans, so when you get a response, turn it and the letter you sent in to your teacher for the display.

Additional Lesson Ideas:

Can you come up with a class band? After looking at the display of bands, does one pop out that the class might wish to adopt?

Consider obtaining a mini-grant from the Foundation for Bluegrass Music (www.bluegrassfoundation.org) to defray the cost of actually inviting a bluegrass band to your school. (Click on the "Programs" tab at the top of the page.)

As learners go through the sites examining the lives and accomplishments of musicians, have them comment on similarities/differences they have with this population.

If the teacher has access to bluegrass recordings, s/he may wish to allow learners to explore songs and bands this way before checking the websites. S/he might also play selections for the class to provide more general awareness and direction. If there is a bluegrass festival in your area during the school year, you may want to find out the roster of artists who will be performing so that learners can research a band they might be able to meet in person at the event.

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