

DISCOVER BLUEGRASS: Exploring American Roots Music

Unit 4: The Growth and Expansion of Bluegrass – Our Own Personal Stamp

As we have seen in the history of bluegrass, almost as soon as Bill Monroe and his Blue Grass Boys created the classic form of this music in the mid-'40s, others began to modify and personalize it. A new term, "newgrass" was even coined to describe one direction this progress took. Is this the way with all inventions? As soon as the backstroke, blender or English language was invented, were they swept up by the human desire to modify or personalize?

In this lesson, using the bluegrass example for inspiration, learners will explore the human inclination to make the old new or add our "personal stamp" to the things around us.

Typical standards addressed:

Invention/discovery
Library and information skills
Critical thinking

Things you will need:

Library and other information resources
Equipment and material for visual displays

Procedure:

Choose any modern invention. Inventions might include electronics, clothing, transportation, sports, music or anything that had a moment of creation. Using the information resources available to you, trace the history of this invention back to its earliest origins. Explore:

- Who invented it?
- When/where was it invented?
- What did the first one look like?
- What problem or function was it created to address?
- How did it work?
- How did the public react to it?

Then, trace the forms it has gone through to bring it to its present state.

Consider:

- What were the changes or improvements?
- Why do you think people felt the need to modify it?
- Did the improvements always really "improve" the original invention?
- What was the difference in cost, then and now?

As an example, consider television.

- It was invented in the 1940s.
- In the '50s TVs had a circular screen and black & white image.
- TVs were made to look like furniture as larger screens appeared.
- Color TV was invented.
- Portable TVs became popular.
- Big screen machines were developed.
- HDTV was invented.
- TVs with plasma screens are in many homes.

Share your findings in one of these forms:

1. an annotated timeline on a large sheet of paper that moves from left to right, discussing the questions. Where possible, cut/paste, download or draw pictures to show the invention in its various stages of development.
2. A booklet that charts the stages of progress in a series of pages.
3. A bulletin board display that demonstrates the transformation in a series of labeled visuals.

Additional Lesson Ideas:

Discuss: Is this kind of modification and personalization really the essence of progress? Americans seem to like things “new and improved.” Is this how it happens?

Can you think of something that has resisted change? How did that manage to happen?

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