

Blind Boy Fuller



Lesson Plan

OBJECTIVE: *To better understand and appreciate the contributions of Blind Boy Fuller to the history of North Carolina and the United States.*

Social Studies Objectives: 9.02

Social Studies Skills: 1, 2, 3, 5

Language Arts Objectives: 1.03, 1.04, 2.01, 5.01, 6.01, 6.02

Resources / Materials

- Biographical sketch
- Internet access (optional)
- Activities page
- Menu of Activities for North Carolina African American Musicians

Procedures

- Students will read and discuss the biographical sketch of Blind Boy Fuller either as a whole class or in groups. Reading can also be done independently.
- Students will complete Activities page as designated by the teacher.
- Students will complete one or more projects in the "Menu of Activities for North Carolina African American Musicians" as designated by the teacher.

Evaluation

- Student participation in reading and discussion of Blind Boy Fuller
- Student performance on the Activities page
- Student participation in the "Menu of Activities for North Carolina African American Musicians"

Bibliography

"Blind Boy Fuller:" *MSN Entertainment-Music: Blind Boy Fuller.* 10 March 2003.

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<http://www.oafb.net/onceblu21.html>

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Blind Boy Fuller



Biographical Sketch

Blind Boy Fuller was once the best-known blues guitarist in the state. Born in 1908, in Anson County, North Carolina, Blind Boy Fuller's real name was Fulton Allen. His parents, Calvin and Mary Jane Allen, were tenant farmers. Fuller had 15 brothers and sisters. His family was poor, hard working, and deeply religious. The family was not very musical, and their exposure to music was through church and social gatherings. Fuller had no aspirations to be a musician before the age of 20, when he began to have problems with his sight. Problems with his sight convinced him to focus more on music. By this time, he was living in Rockingham in Richmond County, North Carolina. He had begun performing by playing his guitar and singing.

In 1927, when he was 19, Fuller married 14-year-old Cora Mae Martin and moved from Rockingham to Winston-Salem, North Carolina. He worked in a coal yard until he completely lost his sight. Hearing that musicians could make money in Durham, the couple moved there. He played his guitar and sang for money outside Durham's downtown tobacco warehouses in the 1930s and 1940s. He became acquainted with local players, the Trice Brothers, and a musician known as "Oh Red" or "Bull City Red." Fulton also played with Sonny Terry, another blind musician who played the harmonica, and with Gary Davis, a talented blind guitarist.

James Baxter Long, a recording company scout, discovered Fuller. Long escorted Fuller, "Bull City Red" and Gary Davis to New York to make their first record. Fulton became one of the most successful Piedmont bluesmen. At about this time, Fuller became known as Blind Boy Fuller, and he recorded

130 songs between 1935 and 1941. His records were the most popular in jukeboxes in African American hangouts across the state. One record, "Step It Up and Go" sold more than half-a-million copies. Blind Boy Fuller became one of the most popular recording artists in the South. His music influenced other blues artists, and many North Carolinians and Virginians still continue to play his songs and mimic his style.

Blind Boy Fuller recorded most of his music over a short six-year span. He played in multiple styles including slide, ragtime, pop, and blues—all enhanced by his steel guitar. He was an expressive vocalist and a masterful guitar player. Blind Boy Fuller died young at the age of 33 in 1941. His wife, Cora Mae, was at his side when he passed away in their Durham home.

Blind Boy Fuller was honored in 2001–2002 on a North Carolina State Historical Marker and on a Durham City marker. He was also listed as one of 100 people who had influenced North Carolina history the most. Durham's mayor proclaimed "Blind Boy Fuller Day" in May 2001. On October 19, 2002, in his hometown of Wadesboro in Anson County, a brick paver was dedicated in his honor. The brick was placed in front of the Hampton Allen Library to give hometown recognition for Blind Boy Fuller. Citizens of North Carolina are proud of their world famous Piedmont bluesman.

Blind Boy Fuller



Activities

Personal Response

If you could interview Blind Boy Fuller, what are some questions that you would ask him? Explain why you selected the interview questions.

Analyzing Biographical Information

1. Explain why Fulton and his wife moved to Durham.
2. List the styles Blind Boy Fuller played. For extra credit, research the styles and present your findings to the class.
3. Identify how Blind Boy Fuller has been honored in the twenty-first century in North Carolina.

Interpreting Meaning

Directions: Find the terms *exposure* and *escorted* in the passage. Explain these terms by using context clues and/or by using the dictionary.

Creative Responses

1. Select one of the activities from the Menu of North Carolina African American Musicians to complete.
2. If you were to create a CD featuring African American musicians (living and deceased) from North Carolina, what songs by which artists would you include? For extra credit, design the CD jacket, using your own artwork or a collage of images you collect from various sources.

Blind Boy Fuller



Activities ■ Answer Key for Teachers

Personal Response

If you could interview Blind Boy Fuller, what are some questions that you would ask him? Explain why you selected the interview questions.

Responses will vary and can serve as a springboard for discussion.

Analyzing Biographical Information

1. Explain why Fuller and his wife moved to Durham.

Fuller and his wife moved to Durham because they had heard that musicians could make money in the city.

2. List the styles Blind Boy Fuller played. For extra credit, research the styles and present your findings to the class.

Blind Boy Fuller's styles included slide, ragtime, pop, and blues enhanced with a steel guitar.

3. Identify how Blind Boy Fuller has been honored in the twenty-first century in North Carolina.

Blind Boy Fuller has been honored in the twenty-first century in North Carolina by his name being placed on a North Carolina State Historical Marker, a Durham City Marker, and he is listed as one of 100 people with the most influence on North Carolina history. Durham's mayor proclaimed "Blind Boy Fuller Day" in May 2001. On October 19, 2002, a brick paver was dedicated in his honor in front of Hampton Allen Library in Wadesboro in Anson County.

Interpreting Meaning

Directions: Find the term in the passage. Explain the terms by using context clues and/or by using the dictionary.

1. exposure (Make known; experience)
2. escorted (To go with)

Creative Responses

Directions: Select one of the activities from the Menu of North Carolina African American Musicians to complete.

Responses will vary.