

# BLUES IN THE NIGHT

## STUDY GUIDE



Conceived and Originally Directed by Sheldon Epps  
Original Vocal Arrangements and Musical Direction by Chapman Roberts  
Orchestrations and Additional Vocal Arrangements by Sy Johnson

Directed by Ron OJ Parson

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## DEAR EDUCATORS:

Welcome to Season 52 at Alabama Shakespeare Festival! The amount of effort it takes to coordinate a trip from the classroom to the theater is not lost on us. Thank you for recognizing the value of live theatre for your students! We at ASF believe in the transformative power of the arts and its ability to educate, entertain, and inspire.

ASF is committed to supporting educators in the classroom. By engaging with this play and all others in our regular season, teachers will be able to address several standards in the state and national curriculum. It is our hope that all study materials and lesson activities are useful for classroom educators, though not exhaustive.

Viewing a performance at Alabama Shakespeare Festival and participating in the post-performance discussion can serve as a powerful springboard for positive classroom discourse, detailed and specific writing, and rich individual student exploration. Below you will find just a few of the possibilities for aligning your study of our productions to National Core Arts and Alabama Course of Study literacy standards.

See you at the theater!

## ALABAMA COURSE OF STUDY:

### ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS

[ELA21.W.6.1] Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

[ELA22.W.6.2] Write informative or explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

[ELA15.RI.6.5] Analyze how a particular sentence, paragraph, chapter, or section fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the ideas.

[ELA16.RI.6.6] Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text.

[ELA12.RI.9-10.3] Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.

[ELA4.RL.11-12.4] Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

### ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS *cont.*

[ELA5.RL.11-12.5] Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

[ELA7.RL.11-12.7] Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text. (Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist.)

### NATIONAL CORE ARTS ANCHOR STANDARDS

TH.Re7.1 Perceive and analyze artistic work.

TH.Re8.1 Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

TH.Re9.1 Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

TH.Cn10.1 Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

TH.Cn11.1 Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.

## PLOT

**“A man is a two-face, a worrisome thing who’ll leave you to sing, the blues in the night.”**

*Blues in the Night* uses the great blues and jazz songs of the 1920s and ‘30s to explore the lives of three women and a saloon singer in a cheap hotel during the course of a long memory-filled evening.

As the music begins, the lights come up on three women sitting in what look like individual hotel rooms in a worn-down dive. The women are in period dress, reflecting Chicago in the late 1930s. The Lady from the Road, a warm and beautiful woman in her late 50s or early 60s, has surrounded herself with memories of her brighter past. The Woman of the World, a stylish creature of indeterminate age, surrounded by an equal amount of perfume and liquor bottles, spends the evening preparing for her gentleman caller. The Girl with a Date sits in a sparsely decorated room determined to make a fresh start in the big city. Behind them, The Man in the Saloon, at once charming and dangerous, watches with a wary eye and comments with a silver tongue.

With little spoken text, the interweaving stories are defined through glorious songs that cover the range of this indigenous American art form, from Bessie Smith to Duke Ellington, Johnny Mercer, Harold Arlen, Alberta Hunter, Jimmy Cox, Ida Cox, and more, telling of the pain and misery of life and love — and also of the dogged determination to get through it all — that is the essence of the Blues. In the finale, all four singers join in “I Gotta Right to Sing the Blues / Blue Blues.” The audience is left with an emotional impression of what life was like in the late 1930s in Chicago — good music, hard lives, and dreams that stretch on long into the night.

**Think about it:** *Blues in the Night* is not a linear story — largely only told through song. What do you think might happen to these characters? Why do you think the writers chose this approach to the storytelling?

## CHARACTERS

**The Woman of the World** — A beautiful and stylish woman who came from a grandiose and rich lifestyle. She deludes herself into believing she is still living the high-life and spends each evening preparing for the next gentleman caller.

**The Girl with a Date** — A youthful, energetic, enthusiastic girl. Bright and clever, but innocent and prone to vulnerability.

**The Lady from the Road** — A warm and beautiful African American woman. Humorous and full of gossip, she possesses a wealth of experience in her long life. Has fallen from grace, and she knows it, but hopeful she will rise again.

**The Man in the Saloon** — A simultaneously very charming and slightly dangerous guy. Exudes confidence and control in his sly remarks to the women but is secretly frustrated and lonely.

## SETTING

Chicago in the late 1930s.  
A “cheap” hotel.

**Think about it:** When reviewing the character descriptions, you’ll notice the characters are only identified as “the woman...” or “the man...” Why do you think the writers choose not to give these characters names? How might this device serve the storytelling? Explain.

## ACT ONE:

**“Blue Blues”** — The Company  
by Bessie Smith

**“Four Walls (And One Dirty Window) Blues”** — The Man  
and The Lady  
by Willard Robinson

**“I’ve Got A Date With A Dream”** — The Woman and The Girl  
by Mack Gordon and Harry Revel

**“New Orleans Hop Scop Blues”** — The Lady  
by George W. Thomas

**“Stompin’ At The Savoy”** — The Woman  
by Benny Goodman, Andy Razaf, Edgar Sampson, and  
Chick Webb

**“Taking A Chance On Love”** — The Girl  
by Vernon Duke, John LaTouche, and Ted Fetter

**“It Makes My Love Come Down”** — The Woman  
by Bessie Smith

**“Lush Life”** — The Woman  
by Billy Strayhorn

**“I’m Just A Lucky So-And-So”** — The Man  
by Duke Ellington and Mack David

**“Take Me For A Buggy Ride”** — The Lady  
by Leola and Wesley Wilson

**“Wild Women Don’t Have The Blues”** — The Man  
by Ida Cox

**“Lover Man”** — The Lady  
by Jimmy Davis, Jimmy Sherman, and  
Roger “Ram” Ramirez

**“Willow Weep For Me”** — The Girl  
by Ann Ronell

**“Kitchen Man”** — The Lady  
by Andy Razaf and Wesley Wilson

**“When Your Lover Has Gone”** — The Woman and  
The Girl  
by E. A. Swan

**“Take It Right Back”** — The Women  
by H. Grey

## ACT TWO:

**Jam Session (“Wild Women Don’t Have  
the Blues”)** — The Band  
by Ida Cox

**“Blues In The Night”** — The Company  
by Harold Arlen and Johnny Mercer

**“Dirty No-Gooder’s Blues”** — The Lady  
by Bessie Smith

**“When A Woman Loves A Man”** — The Company  
by Johnny Mercer, Gordon Jenkins, and Bernard Hanighen

**“Am I Blue?”** — The Company  
by Grand Clarke and Harry Akst

**“Rough And Ready Man”** — The Woman  
by Alberta Hunter

**“Reckless Blues”** — The Girl  
by Bessie Smith

**“Wasted Life Blues”** — The Lady  
by Bessie Smith

**“Baby Doll”** — The Man  
by Bessie Smith

**“Nobody Knows You When You’re Down  
And Out”** — The Company  
by Jimmy Cox

**“I Gotta Right To Sing The Blues”** — The Women  
by Harold Arlen and Ted Koehler

**“Four Walls (Reprise)”** — The Company  
by Willard Robinson



A jukebox musical is an original stage musical not based on a film that features a compilation of well-known, popular songs in its score that may or may not have any direct relation to the story. These songs are woven together by a specific time period or sometimes reveal an intimate view of an iconic performer's life and body of work. The music is integrated into the plot and presented as a singularly unified story — sometimes the plot is completely fictional.

The genre began to take off with the smash-hit Broadway success of *Mamma Mia!*, a fictional musical told through the iconic music of the 1970s international supergroup ABBA. Today, there are dozens of jukebox musicals — like *Blues in the Night* — that have captivated audiences on Broadway and around the world, bringing brand new fans to the theatre! Most recently, musicals like the smash hit *Ain't Too Proud: The Life and Times of the Temptations* and *MJ: The Musical* have continued to achieve great success.



Myles Frost in *MJ: the Musical*. Photo by Matthew Murphy



Broadway cast of *Ain't Too Proud: The Life and Times of the Temptations*. Photo by Matthew Murphy.



Sheldon Epps conceived and directed the Duke Ellington musical *Play On!*, which received three Tony Award nominations and was produced at Seattle Repertory Theatre and the Goodman Theatre in Chicago, where it received four Jefferson Awards including Best Musical. The Pasadena Playhouse production was taped by PBS for broadcast as part of the Great Performances series. He also conceived and directed the highly acclaimed musical revue *Blues in the Night*. The Broadway production was nominated for a Tony Award as Best Musical of the Year, and the London production, which he also directed, was nominated for two Laurence Olivier Awards and ran for over a year on the West End before being broadcast in Europe by Thames Television. Epps was a cofounder and the associate artistic director of the Off-Broadway theatre The Production Company. His directorial assignments for that company included *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Incandescent Tones*, and *Scenes and Revelations*, which he also directed on Broadway at the Circle In The Square Theatre.

Epps has directed plays and musicals for many of the country's major theatres, including the Guthrie, the Old Globe Theatre, Manhattan Theatre Club, Seattle Repertory Theatre, Playwrights Horizons, Crossroads Theatre, Cleveland Play House, Arizona Theatre Company, Goodspeed Opera House, Coconut Grove Playhouse, Walnut St. Theatre, George Street Playhouse, and Asolo State Theatre. For television, he has directed episodes of *Frasier*, *Friends*, *Girlfriends*, *My Wife and Kids*, *Veronica's Closet*, *Evening Shade* and *Sister, Sister*. He is currently a member of the executive board of the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers.

Epps is a two-time recipient of the Theatre Communications Group/Pew Charitable Trust National Theatre Artists Residency Grant, which supported his four-year tenure at the Old Globe Theatre as associate artistic director. Epps was pleased to join the Pasadena Playhouse as artistic director in 1997. His directing credits at this theatre include *Blue*, *Play On!*, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *The Old Settler*, *The Real Thing*, *On Borrowed Time*, *Mr. Rick-ey Calls a Meeting*, *Blues in the Night*, and he was production consultant for the musical *Sisterella*. He directed the world premiere of *Blue* at Arena Stage Theatre, which was also produced Off-Broadway at the Roundabout Theatre. Following its record-breaking engagement in Pasadena, *Blue* began a national tour co-produced by the Pasadena Playhouse.

**Blues Time** — Usually late at night or early morning; a time when a person might feel especially “blue” or depressed.

**Blue Note** — A note that — for expressive purposes — is sung or played at a slightly lowered pitch from standard.

**Booked** — The process through which an agency or a “booker” secures an artist or group of artists for a live performance.

**Bootleg** — Something manufactured to sell or transport for sale that is illegal.

**Chittlin’ Circuit** — A group of theatres and nightclubs that catered to Black audiences and featured Black entertainers in a time when they could not find work elsewhere.

**Dive** — a shabby, often rundown, establishment — usually a bar or nightclub.

**Flapper** — A reference to a young woman of the 1920s who demonstrated freedom from societal standards or conventions, especially as it related to appearance and dress.

**Frankfurters** — A cured cooked sausage (beef or beef and pork) that may be skinless or stuffed in a casing or “franks.”

**Jigs** — A lively upbeat dance or style of movement. The jig influenced 20th-century African-American tap and soft-shoe dance styles. You can also call the type of tune that’s played to accompany the dance a “jig.”

**Juke Joint** — An informal type of drinking and dancing establishment that arose along the rural back roads of the South to serve the regional Black population; similar to a “dive.”

**Revue** — A theatrical production consisting typically of brief, loosely connected, often satirical skits, songs, and dances.

**Saloon** — A room, establishment, or gathering place where alcoholic beverages were served.

**The Savoy** — The Savoy ballroom was a large hall or swing dance venue that opened in 1926 for music and public dancing in Harlem, New York. This “home of happy feet” was established during the peak of the Harlem Renaissance.

**T.O.B.A.** — An acronym for the Theatre Owners Booking Association, which was the vaudeville circuit for Black performers in the 1920s curated for Black audiences.





Blues music originated in the Deep South after the **American Civil War** (19th to early 20th century), an evolution of spirituals, work songs, and field hollers. The rural blues developed in three principal regions: Georgia and the Carolinas, Texas, and Mississippi. **The Mississippi Delta blues** has proven to have been the most influential region. **W.C. Handy's** "Memphis Blues" was one of the first instrumental hit blues recordings. Although the Blues derived from and was largely dominated by Black men, the first vocal blues recordings were made in the 1920s by Black women, beginning with **Mamie Smith**, who would go on to achieve considerable success across the Deep South as the genre came into mainstream popularity.

The impending **Great Depression** nearly destroyed the record industry altogether, making recordings of the blues during the 1930s rather scarce. However, the difficulties many Americans were facing during this time made "sing-ing the blues" ever more popular than before. Many people turned to this music genre to "chase the blues away." The lyrics took on more urban themes, and the concept of a blues ensemble developed as the solo bluesman was joined by a rhythm section and piano or harmonica.

The enduring influence of the blues has been cemented in **American music culture**, as people have been singing the blues since times untold. The blues has become the basis for nearly every form of American popular music over the past 100 years including jazz, R&B, rock & roll, and hip-hop. Early rock singers like **Elvis Presley** often used blues material from early pioneers like **Sister Rosetta Tharpe** and **Chuck Berry**. The storytelling tradition and sharing of common experiences of the blues continues to attract new audiences — proving the genre's ability to adapt and survive.

**Think about it:** Many famous blues contemporaries, like Gary Clark Jr., continue the tradition of blues music today. Take a moment to research modern blues artists. What similarities or differences did you find with the early blues icons listed above?



A desperate man sells his car with a sign that reads \$100 will buy this car. Must have cash. Lost all in stock market. Photo Getty Images.



Ma Rainey "The Mother of the Blues" and her band. Photo by Michael Ochs Archives Getty Images



# A MOSAIC OF EARLY BLUES LEGENDS



**W.C. HANDY**  
"Father of the Blues"  
1873 - 1958



**MAMIE SMITH**  
"Queen of the Blues"  
1883 - 1946



**MA RAINEY**  
"Mother of the Blues"  
1886 - 1939



**"BLIND LEMON" JEFFERSON**  
"Father of the Texas Blues"  
1893 - 1929



**BESSIE SMITH**  
"Empress of Blues"  
1894 - 1937



**ROBERT JOHNSON**  
"King of the Delta Blues"  
1911 - 1938



**SAMUEL JOHN HOPKINS**  
"Lightnin' Hopkins"  
1912 - 1982



**MUDDY WATERS**  
"Father of Modern Chicago Blues"  
1913 - 1983



**ROSETTA THARPE**  
"Godmother of Rock & Roll"  
1915 - 1973



**B.B. KING**  
"Beale Street Blues Boy"  
1925 - 2015



**RAY CHARLES**  
"The Genius"  
1930 - 2004



**ETTA JAMES**  
"Matriarch of R&B"  
1938 - 2012

**Think about it:** Although there are many artists who contributed to the genre of blues music, this list features artists whose contributions cannot be denied. Choose an artist to research! What interesting things did you discover about their life and/or career? Share your discoveries with your class! Is there anyone who isn't on this list who you believe should have been included? Explain.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### PRE-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to have “the blues”? What feelings or emotions are we describing when we say we’re feeling “blue”? What gives you the blues? Explain.
2. How would you describe “the blues” style of music? What are some characteristics unique to this musical genre? Why do you think people choose to sing the blues? Explain.
3. Who are some of your favorite artists or bands? In what ways has music impacted your life? Are there any songs you go to in particular when you’re feeling “blue”? Explain.

### POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe the overall tone and style of the storytelling in this performance. Was there anything you experienced that surprised you? Explain.
2. How would you describe the relationships between the characters? Did they seem to interact as if they knew each other? Could you identify a clear protagonist and/or antagonist? Did you feel a sense of transformation? Explain.

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. **On your feet:** Chasing the blues away! As a class, create a list of people or groups within your school or community that may sometimes feel “blue” and appreciate a little encouragement (ex. teachers/administrators, nursing home residents, first responders, etc.) Divide the class into small groups, then have each group choose a person/place and brainstorm ideas that might have the most impact at little to no cost (write a song, deliver candy or a note, etc.). Share your group’s idea(s) with the class! Discuss.

**Variation:** Have the students vote on the best idea/group, then make plans to come together and complete the project as a class! Take pictures!

2. **At your desk:** Choose a blues legend from page nine to research! Find out the most intriguing facts you can about them and present your research to the class! Use your archeology skills to dig for information even your teacher probably wouldn’t know. Make your presentation interesting! You may choose to write an essay, create a poster, a slide presentation, collage, etc. Get creative!

Teachers: You will find additional classroom activity sheets attached below! Use them however you like. Please let us know if you find these helpful or have other ideas for additional resources.

## ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

**Anticipation Activity**

**Paired Text: “Blues in the Night” Lyrics Analysis**

**Responding to Live Theatre: *Blues in the Night* Critical Response**

## ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES

*History of Blues Music*

<https://www.britannica.com/art/blues-music>

*All About Blues Music*

<https://www.allaboutbluesmusic.com/>

*The Painful Birth of Blues and Jazz*

<https://blogs.loc.gov/folklife/2017/02/birth-of-blues-and-jazz/>

*What is blues music?*

<https://www.classical-music.com/articles/blues-music>

*Rise of the Review | Broadway: The American Musical*

<https://www.pbs.org/wnet/broadway/essays/rise-of-the-revue/>



Before you see the show, respond to the following statements as honestly as possible by circling your response. Then, explain your answer with an example.

SA – Strongly Agree, A – Agree, D – Disagree, SD – Strongly Disagree

<b>STATEMENT #1:</b> Certain genres of music should only belong to its native culture.			
SA	A	D	SD
Explain your answer with an example:			

<b>STATEMENT #2:</b> It is not normal for a person to have “the blues.”			
SA	A	D	SD
Explain your answer with an example:			

<b>STATEMENT #3:</b> Music has the power to both positively and negatively impact mental health.			
SA	A	D	SD
Explain your answer with an example:			

<b>STATEMENT #4:</b> Reflecting on the past can be both traumatic and therapeutic.			
SA	A	D	SD
Explain your answer with an example:			

**Teachers:** A variation of this activity: “Four Corners.” Make signs with the SA, A, SD, and D labels. Then, ask the students to stand in the middle of the classroom. Repeat each question aloud (or create new ones) and allow them to move to the corner of the room that best represents their opinion. Discuss.

## BLUES IN THE NIGHT

**Directions:** Take a moment to review the lyrics below to the title song of *Blues in the Night*, then follow the steps below. Use the back if necessary.

**Step 1: Annotate.** Highlight or underline important lyrics, identifying specific differences or similarities. Note: These are two *real* versions of the same song.

**Step 2: Evaluate.** Compare and contrast differences and similarities in the lyrics. How do the differences affect the overall tone of the text? Are the two artists attempting to say the same thing? What story are they telling? Explain.

**Step 3: Respond.** Write a short response in favor or against one or both sets of lyrics, then pair with a partner to discuss your conclusions. Share with the class!

### “Blues in the Night”

Ella Fitzgerald

My mama done told me,  
when I was in pigtails  
My mama done told me, uuhm  
A man’s gonna sweet talk  
and give you the big eye  
But when the sweet talkin’s done  
A man is a two-face,  
a worrisome thing who’ll leave you to sing the  
blues in the night

Now the rain’s a-fallin’,  
hear the train’s a-callin’,  
“Oo-oo-wee!”  
My mama done told me, hear that lonesome  
whistle  
Blowin’ ‘cross the trestle,  
“Oo-oo-wee!”  
My mama done tols me, a-oo-wee-da-oo-wee  
Ol’ clickety-clack’s sending echoin’ back the  
blues in the night

### “Blues in the Night”

Cab Calloway

My mama done tol’ me  
When I was in kneepants  
My mama done tol’ me, Son!  
A woman’ll sweet talk  
And give ya the glad-eyes  
But when the sweet talkin’s done  
A woman’s a two-face  
A worrisome thing who’ll leave ya t’ sing  
the blues in the night

Now the rain’s a-fallin’  
Hear the train a-callin’  
Whoo-ee  
Hear that lonesome whistle  
Blowin’ ‘cross the trestle  
Whoo-ee  
A whoo-ee-duh whoo-ee  
Ol’ clickety clack’s a-echoin’ back the blues  
in the night  
My mama was right, there’s blues in the night

Compare - note the similarity between  
Contrast - note the difference between

## BLUES IN THE NIGHT

### CRITICAL REVIEW

**Directions:** Imagine you are the official theatre critic for this production at ASF! For each area of the production, give thoughtful and honest feedback. Be specific and answer each prompt using complete sentences. Use the back of the page if necessary.

#### I. Playwright/Story

Use the space below to discuss elements of the story. What worked well? Did anything strike you negatively?

#### II. Performance/Acting

Use the space below to give constructive feedback about the actors' performances in the production. Was there a performer whom you particularly enjoyed? What could have been better?

#### III. Directing

Use the space below to discuss the overall direction and interpretation of this production. Remember, nothing happens by accident. Did anything surprise you?

#### IV. Technical Elements

Use the space below to discuss the lighting, sound, scenery, and costumes for this production. Were you transported to a different time/place? Did these elements effectively serve the story? Explain.