



### Grade 5

#### Standard:

5.MU:Pr4.1—Demonstrate and explain how the selection of music to perform is influenced by personal interest, knowledge, and context, as well as their personal and others' technical skill.

## Write a Song—Understanding Music as an Art Form

Music is an art, and art is a body of work that tells a story or conveys a message. Art always has a specific purpose, though sometimes the purpose is up to the viewer, listener, or receiver to decide what it is. However, most of the time, the viewer, listener, or receiver can understand clearly what message or purpose the artist has. Art is often heavily influenced by **culture** (the customary beliefs, social customs, and material traits of a regional, racial, religious, or social group), **historical context** (the events and mood occurring at the time in history when the art was created), **personal interests**, and **knowledge**. Take a look at the song “Black, Brown, and White” by Big Bill Broonzy as an example to understand the elements that musicians consider when creating music. Then, write your own song that shares a message you want to tell.

- 1) Read the **lyrics** (words in a song) below. You can listen to the song if you'd like [here](#).

### *“Black, Brown and White” by Big Bill Broonzy*

This little song that I'm singin' about  
People you know it's true  
If you're black and gotta work for a living, now  
This is what they will say to you

They says if you was white, should be all right  
If you was brown, stick around  
But as you's black, woah brother, get back get back get back

I was in a place one night

They was all having fun  
They was all buyin' beer and wine  
But they would not sell me none

They said if you was white, should be all right  
If you was brown, stick around  
But if you black, woah brother, get back get back get back I went to an employment  
office  
Got a number 'n' I got in line  
They called everybody's number  
But they never did call mine

They said if you was white, should be all right  
If you was brown, stick around  
But as you black, woah brother, get back get back get back

Me and a man was workin' side by side  
This is what it meant  
They was paying him a dollar an hour  
And they was paying me fifty cent

They said if you was white, should be all right  
If you was brown, stick around  
But as you black, woah brother, get back get back get back

I helped build this country  
and I fought for it too  
Now I guess that you can see what a black man have to do

They says if you was white, should be all right  
If you was brown, stick around  
But as you's black, woah brother, get back get back get back

I helped win sweet victory  
With my little plough and hoe  
Now I want you to tell me brother  
What you gonna do 'bout the old Jim Crow?

Now if you was white, should be all right  
If you was brown, could stick around  
But if you's black, whoa brother, get back get back get back

- 2) Read the following history about the time that Big Bill Broonzy wrote the song and why he wrote it.
- a. Big Bill Broonzy's real name was Lee Conley Bradley. He was born in either Arkansas or Mississippi (it is not known which of the two) in 1903. He fought in World War I when he was drafted into it (legally selected and required by the US government to fight in a war). He also worked as a farmer and was a preacher in his early adult life (2020).
  - b. This song was written in 1938 when **segregation**, or the separation of people of color and white people in housing and public services, was legal and encouraged in many states. For example, black Americans were forced to use black-only schools, swimming pools, drinking fountains, and bathrooms. Black people were told to sit in the backs of buses, but if a bus was full and a white person wanted a seat, black people were required to give up their seats and stand for white passengers to have the privilege to sit. These requirements were legal, and if black people broke those laws, they would be sent to jail. Basically, many white people did not want black people around, and they were legally allowed to **racially discriminate** or act on their dislike toward a people based on their race.
  - c. The genre (pronounced 'zhän-rə), or style of music categorized by instrumentation, singing methods, rhythm, lyrics, or other musical elements, is the blues. Some examples of other genres are rock, pop, and rap. The blues was a genre created by black musical artists from the southern United States in the 1870s (Wikimedia, 2020). Blues songs often sang about racial discrimination that black people faced, and they have a sort of sad sound to them, which is why the genre is called "the blues."
- 2) Now that you have read about the historical and cultural context of the artist and song, do the lyrics of the song mean something different to you? If so, then you are well on your way to understanding music as an art form and writing your own. Go ahead and give it a shot! It's up to you how far you go. You could just write the lyrics as a poem, or you can create music for it too. If you know how to play an instrument and would like to include that in your song, go for it! Think about the following things:
- a. What is something you care about? It can be anything at all. Your family, your favorite food, your best or worst day at school, your hobbies, a stuffed animal—the possibilities are endless. Use that as your song's subject.
  - b. What is the message you are trying to share?
  - c. Do you know of what genre you might want your song to be?

Sources:

*Big Bill Broonzy*. (2020, July 1). [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big\\_Bill\\_Broonzy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_Bill_Broonzy).

History.com Editors. (2019, May 16). *Segregation in the United States*. History.com.  
<https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/segregation-united-states>.

Wikimedia Foundation. (2020, July 22). *Blues*. Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blues>.