

MUSIC · Y3–Y6

Jazz, Blues & Folk

Knowledge Organiser — Y3–Y6

Key features and origins

1

Blues

Originated in the American South in the late 19th century from African American work songs and spirituals. Features: 12-bar chord progression, blue notes (flattened 3rd and 7th), call-and-response.

Example: Robert Johnson, B.B. King, Muddy Waters

2

Jazz

Developed in New Orleans c.1900, combining blues, ragtime, and European harmony. Features: improvisation, syncopation, swing rhythm, complex harmony.

Example: Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, Ella Fitzgerald

3

Folk music

Traditional music passed down through generations, often anonymously. Tells stories of community life, work, protest, and history. Every culture has folk traditions.

Example: Bob Dylan (UK and US folk revival), Joni Mitchell, Woody Guthrie, Fairport Convention

4

Improvisation

Creating music spontaneously in real time — making it up as you go. Central to jazz. The musician follows musical 'rules' (the scale, the chord progression) but invents the melody.

Example: A jazz solo

5

Syncopation

Placing musical accents on the 'off-beat' rather than the main beats. Creates a driving, dancing quality characteristic of jazz.

Example: Swing rhythm, reggae, funk



Artists to listen to

[Start here](#)

- BLUES: B.B. King — 'The Thrill Is Gone'; Robert Johnson — 'Cross Road Blues'; Muddy Waters — 'Mannish Boy'
- JAZZ: Louis Armstrong — 'What a Wonderful World'; Duke Ellington — 'Take the A Train'; Dave Brubeck — 'Take Five'
- FOLK (US): Woody Guthrie — 'This Land Is Your Land'; Bob Dylan — 'Blowin' in the Wind'
- FOLK (UK): The Pogues — 'Dirty Old Town'; Steeleye Span; Fairport Convention — 'Matty Groves'
- THE LINK: blues → jazz → rock and roll → pop. Understanding blues means understanding all of modern music.

