

## The New Kid in Town: Muddy Waters Comes to Chicago

### OVERVIEW

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How did Muddy Waters' music change after he moved to Chicago, and what does that say about the relationship between place and self-expression?

#### OVERVIEW

Have you ever moved to a new town? Or started a new job? Many of our younger students can identify with the emotions that arise when moving somewhere new, being the “new kid” amongst a group of friends, or even trying an activity for the first time. While such experiences may be discomforting, they can also offer opportunities for personal growth. Being exposed to new environments and new people provide us the chance to reflect upon our own sense of identity, and help us determine where exactly we “fit in” with the surrounding environment.



Photo: John Work III

Without the opportunity of being exposed to a new environment, McKinley Morganfield might have never become the highly-influential musician we know today as Muddy Waters. In 1943, Waters left his home in rural Mississippi and headed north to Chicago. Following family members who had already made the trip, he hoped to find a sense of stability and prosperity in Chicago that eluded him in Mississippi.

Muddy Waters dreamed of being a musician in Chicago, but quickly discovered that the acoustic guitar he played on his porch back home wouldn't cut it in the Windy City—it just wasn't loud enough for Chicago bars and house parties. Moreover, Waters began to feel like the Blues he played in Mississippi was too “country,” and didn't connect with the industrial and commercial dynamism of Chicago. So Waters plugged in, and began a music career as an Electric Blues musician in which he ultimately landed 14 recordings in the top ten of the Billboard R&B chart. Decades later, pianist Otis Spann introduced Waters as, “the man who brought the Blues from the country to the city.”

In this lesson, students follow the life journey of Blues musician McKinley “Muddy Waters” Morganfield, from his early beginnings in rural Mississippi to his music career in Chicago, Illinois. In learning about Waters' life, students consider the ways new environments might inspire people to express themselves in different ways. Students then reflect on ways new experiences might have spurred their own personal growth by creating a life roadmap.

## OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

### 1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- The ways a person's surrounding environment might influence their self-expression
- The range of emotions and stresses associated with being in a new place or trying a new activity
- About Blues musician Muddy Waters
- About the Great Migration of African Americans from the South to the North in the early and middle 20th century

### 2. MASTERY OBJECTIVE:

- Students will be able to draw connections between issues of self-expression and geographic place by analyzing key events in the life of Blues musician Muddy Waters.

## ACTIVITIES

### MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. Display **Image 1, Writing Prompt** and have students write a few sentences in response to the prompt. Have students volunteer to relate their experiences to the class, then ask:
  - What might be some emotions people feel when being somewhere new?
  - What are some ways people might try to "fit in" when entering a new place? (*Encourage students to think about how people might change the way they speak, what kinds of music or movies they like, or what activities they do.*)
  - Do you think moving to a new place, trying out a new sport, or joining a new group of friends might change how you express yourself? Why or why not?

### PROCEDURE

1. Tell students that they will be talking about Blues musician Muddy Waters, and the ways his music changed after moving to a new city. Show **Image 2, Muddy Waters and Son Sims, Stoval, Mississippi 1941**. Tell students that this is a picture of a young Muddy Waters (right) and his fellow musician Son Sims (left), then ask:
  - What instruments are Waters and Sims playing?
  - Where does it look like they are in this picture? Does it look more like the country or the city?
  - How would you describe the clothes they are wearing?
2. Tell students that to learn more about Waters' life, they will listen to a song he performed. **Play Clip 1, "Burr Clover Farm Blues" by Muddy Waters**, and ask:

- What instruments do you hear?
  - What is Muddy Waters' singing about in this song? (*Leaving Burr Clover Farm.*)
  - Why might Waters' be singing about a farm?
  - How do you think the singer got the name "Muddy Waters"? (*His grandmother nicknamed him "Muddy" because as a child he like playing in a muddy river bank. "Waters" came later, when he began performing music in Mississippi.*)
  - Based on the picture and the song, what kind of job might have Muddy Waters had?
  - In the song, Waters sings about leaving Burr Clover Farm. Why might he want to leave the farm? Where could he be going?
3. Tell students that Muddy Waters was one of several million African Americans who moved from the US South to the Northern cities in search of better work and living conditions during what came to be known as "The Great Migration." Display **Image 3, Map of Muddy Waters' Travel**, and ask:
- How do you think Muddy Waters might have felt about leaving Mississippi, where he grew up? What do you think he might miss? Would it be easy for him to return home to visit?
  - How might Chicago be different from the Mississippi farm life Waters had always known? (*Encourage students to consider both the social and geographical environments, as well as population density and other rural vs. urban issues.*)
  - How do you think Waters might have felt when he arrived to his new home, 600 miles north, and began to search for work and establish himself?
  - How might have Muddy Waters' music changed after moving to Chicago?
4. Play **Clip 2, Soundbreaking – Blues Musicians Migrate to Chicago**. Ask students:
- What instrument did Muddy Waters and other Blues musicians start playing once they moved to Chicago? (*Students should recall electric guitar from the clip.*)
  - According to the video, why did they switch to electric guitar? (*Encourage students to recognize that it was too loud in the crowded Chicago venues to hear the acoustic guitar and also to think about what the newly electrified instrument might represent in terms of affluence or even "coolness."*)
  - Why didn't they play electric guitar in the south? (*They couldn't afford it.*)
5. Play **Clip 3, "Rollin' Stone,"** and ask students:
- Muddy Waters performed this song in 1960, after moving to Chicago. In what ways is it different than the song "Burr Clover Farm Blues" that you heard earlier? (*Encourage students to note that "Burr" was performed on an acoustic guitar and without any other musicians, while "Rollin' Stone" is performed with a full ensemble and electric instruments.*)
  - Do you notice any other differences in the two performances? (*Encourage students to think about the clothing of the performers, the setting, etc.*)

- Do you notice any similarities between the two performances? What about Muddy Waters seems to have stayed the same?
- In part of this song, Muddy Waters sings “My mother told my father, just before I was born: ‘I got a boy child comin’, he’s gonna be a rollin’ stone.” What do you think Muddy Waters means when he calls himself a “rollin’ stone”? (*Encourage students to think about the connection between “rolling” and “moving,” and also the phrase, “a rolling stone gathers no moss.”*)

6. Prepare students for the **Personal Life Roadmap Activity**. Using paper, crayons, markers, and any other supplies you wish that are available, have students create a “map” of the personal experiences in their lives thus far. The Roadmap can reflect geographic locations as well as personal development achievements. For instance, in addition to showing a move from one town

to another, it could show milestones such as learning to read or ride a skateboard, major events such as winning a sports championship or having a family member get married, etc. Students may wish to continue the Roadmap into the future, adding goals they hope to achieve as well. (*Teachers may also opt to encourage students to create a “Fantasy Roadmap” if they are uncomfortable sharing their past*). After the activity, ask students:

- What were some of the major life events that you listed on your map? Why?
- What sort of geographic locations are on your map? Why are they important to your life?
- Do you think the events and places on your map have contributed to the ways you act or express yourself today? Do you think you would be a different person if you had not had these experiences? Why or why not?

## SUMMARY ACTIVITY

1. Ask students:
  - Other than for added volume, why do you think Muddy Waters may have wanted to switch to electric guitar, update his clothes, and play with a full band? Why might he have decided not to maintain a “Mississippi farmer” image after relocating to Chicago? (*Encourage students to consider how Waters must have wanted to be “cool” and fit in with his surroundings and how, in addition to work, Chicago offered the opportunity to have fun and express himself in ways that were not possible as a farmer.*)
  - What might have been the role of peer pressure in influencing Muddy Water’s decision? Do you think there can be “good” and “bad” peer pressure? How so?
2. **Show Image 2, Writing Prompt**, and ask students to write a short response to the prompt. Call on students to volunteer the responses they wrote down.



## EXTENSION ACTIVITY

1. Imagine that your family is going to move to a new country or state, and you get to pick which one. Pick the place, then find answers to the following questions and record them as a list:
  - When was the place founded?
  - What is the capital city?
  - How many people live there?
  - What types of music is it known for?
  - What types of food is it known for?
  - Are there any famous annual events held in that state?
  - Where do you want to settle within the state? Why?

## STANDARDS

### COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

#### *College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading (K-12)*

Reading 1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

Reading 7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

#### *College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing (K-12)*

Writing 2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

Writing 4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

#### *College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening (K-12)*

Speaking and Listening 1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Speaking and Listening 2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Speaking and Listening 3: Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

Speaking and Listening 4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

#### *College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Language (K-12)*

Language 4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

Language 6: Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary



knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

## **THE COLLABORATIVE FOR ACADEMIC, SOCIAL, AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING COMPETENCIES**

### *Social Awareness*

- Perspective-taking
- Empathy
- Appreciating Diversity
- Respect for Others

### *Relationship Skills*

- Communication
- Social engagement
- Relationship-building

## **SOCIAL STUDIES – NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES (NCSS)**

Theme 1: Culture

Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change

Theme 4: Individual Development and Identity

Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

## **NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION**

### *Core Music Standard: Responding*

Analyze: Analyze how the structure and context of varied musical works inform the response.

Interpret: Support interpretations of musical works that reflect creators' and/or performers' expressive intent.

Evaluate: Support evaluations of musical works and performances based on analysis, interpretation, and established criteria.



### *Core Music Standard: Connecting*

Connecting 11: Relate musical ideas and works to varied contexts and daily life to deepen understanding.

## RESOURCES

### VIDEO RESOURCES

- Burr Clover Farm Blues
- *PBS Soundbreaking* - Blues Musicians Migrate to Chicago
- Muddy Waters - Rollin' Stone



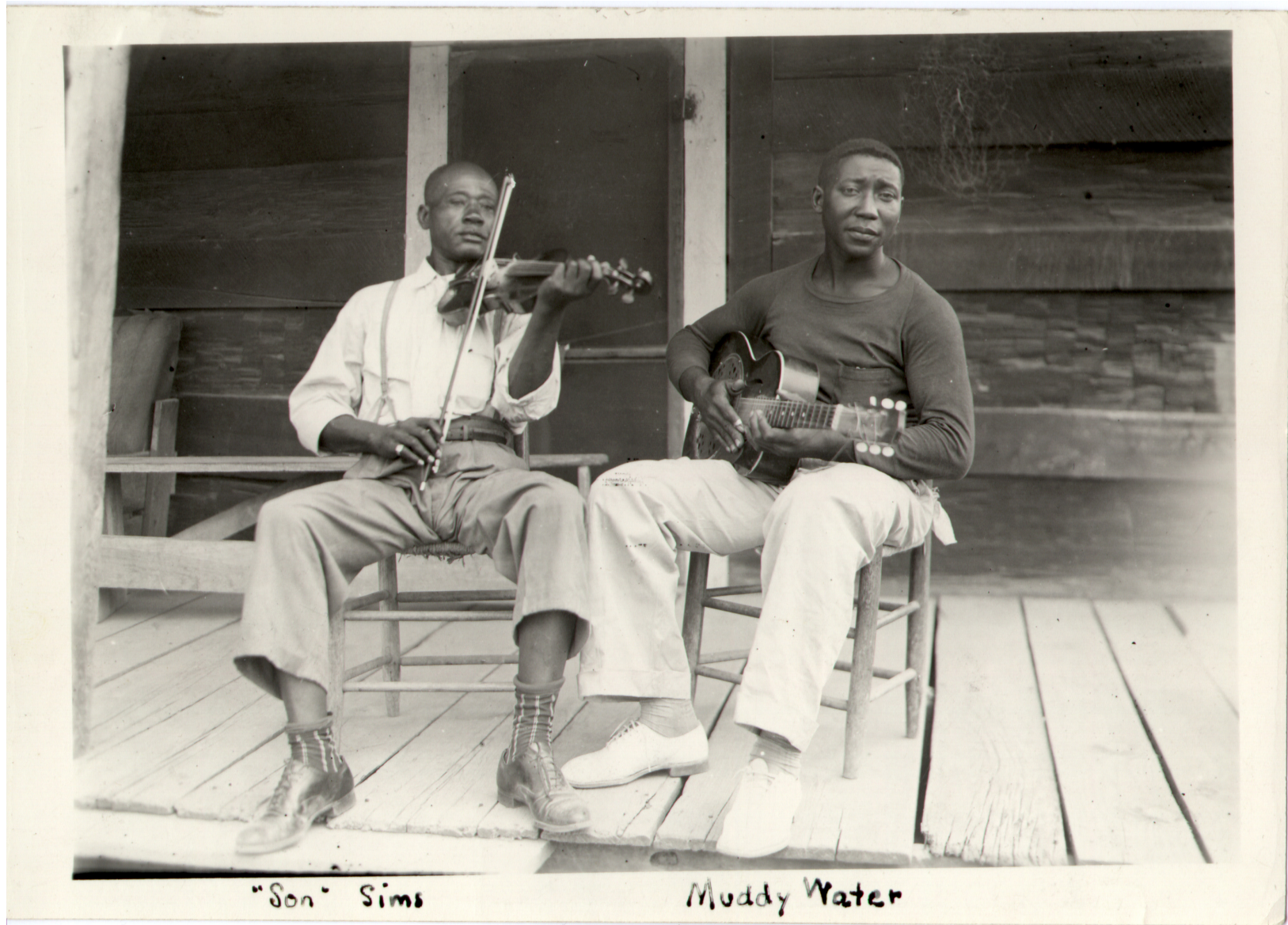
# Lesson Materials



# Image 1, Writing Prompt

Have you ever moved from one town, or school district, to another? If so, can you remember some of the emotions you felt? If you have never made such a transition, can you remember another time you've felt "new" someplace?

# Image 2, , Muddy Waters and Son Sims Stoval, Mississippi 1941

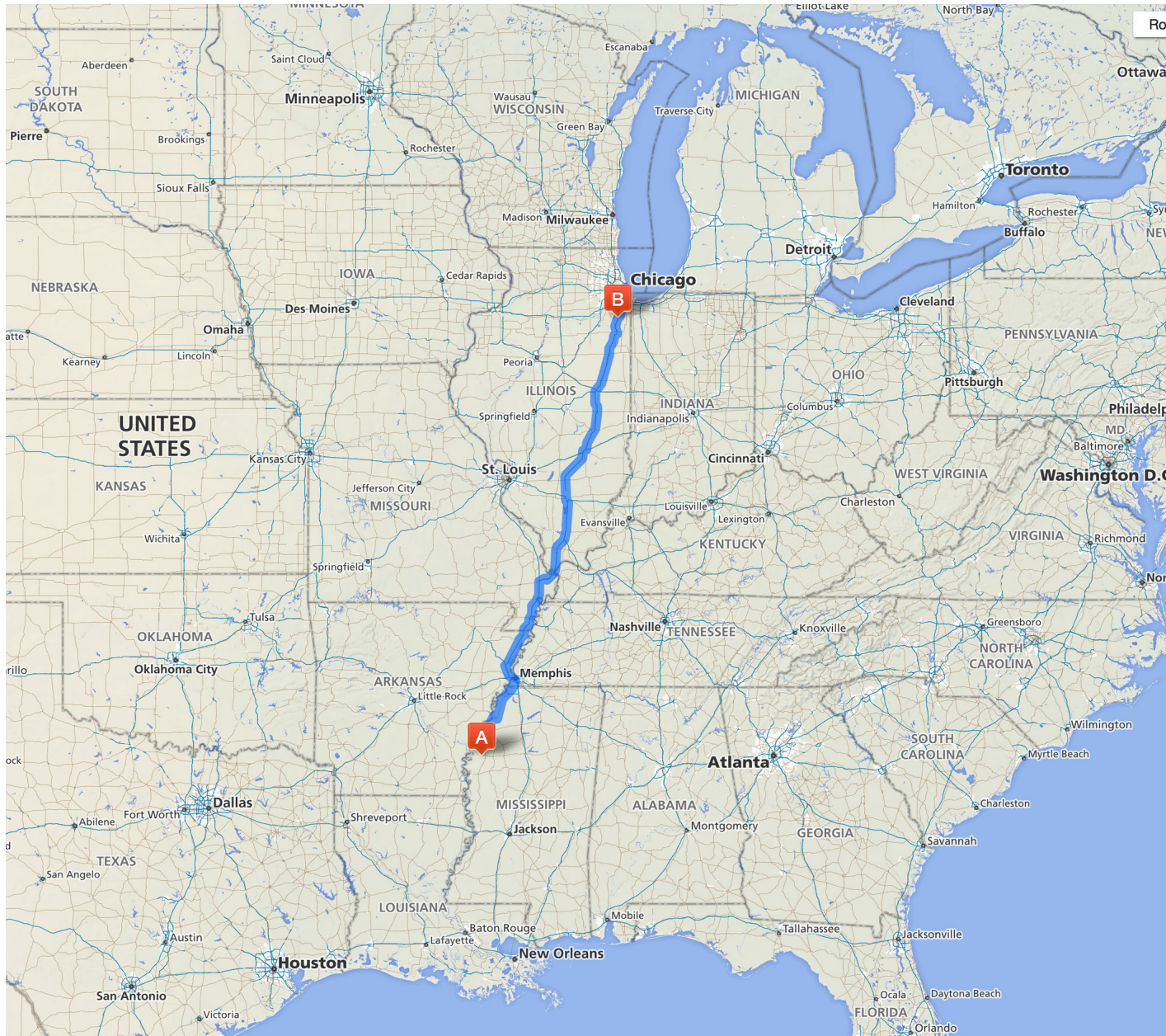


"Son" Sims

Muddy Water



# Image 3, Map of Muddy Waters' Travel



## Image 4, Writing Prompt

Imagine yourself as the “new kid” somewhere. It could be on a sports team, in a new school, or even in a different country. Write down one thing you might adjust about yourself to fit in, and one special thing about yourself you would not change.