

Second Line Arts Collective

Lesson 4: Congo Square

Lesson Overview

Students will explore the historical and cultural importance of Congo Square in New Orleans. Through music, storytelling, and rhythm activities, they'll learn how African and European traditions blended to shape the foundation of New Orleans music.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will:

1. Learn about the history and significance of Congo Square.
2. Understand how African and European cultures blended to create new musical traditions.
3. Participate in a rhythm activity inspired by Congo Square's African drum traditions.

Materials Needed

- [Map of New Orleans](#) or [image](#) of Congo Square.
- Percussion instruments or homemade drums (e.g., buckets, pots, pans).
- Optional: Visual aids of West African instruments and European marching bands.

Lesson Steps

Introduction to Congo Square (5-7 minutes)

- Show students a [map of New Orleans](#) and point out the location of Congo Square.
- Share its history:
 - In the 1700s and 1800s, enslaved Africans gathered in Congo Square on Sundays to play music, dance, and share their culture.
 - This was one of the few places in America where African traditions were openly practiced.

- Over time, these traditions blended with European music, creating new styles like jazz.
- Discuss how Congo Square is still celebrated today as a symbol of resilience and creativity.

Listen and Imagine (5 minutes)

- Play [a recording](#) of African drumming or New Orleans jazz inspired by Congo Square.
- Ask students to close their eyes and imagine what it might have sounded and felt like to be there.
 - What instruments do they hear?
 - How does the music make them feel?

Rhythm Activity: Drum Circle (10-15 minutes)

- Teach students a simple African-inspired rhythm to play on percussion instruments or homemade drums.
 - Example: “Bum-bum-ba-BUM” (slow clap-clap-clap-stomp pattern).
- Lead the group in a call-and-response rhythm activity:
 - Leader plays a rhythm on the drum.
 - Students echo the rhythm using their instruments.
- Encourage creativity by letting students create their own rhythms for the group to follow

Group Reflection and Discussion (5 minutes)

- Ask students:
 - Why do you think Congo Square was important for music and culture?
 - How do you think music helped people share their stories and feelings?
- Discuss how Congo Square influenced the music we hear today.

Extension Activities

- Cultural Exploration: Show pictures of traditional African and European instruments, and discuss how they combined in New Orleans.
- Art Connection: Have students draw or color an image of Congo Square based on what they've learned.
- Music History: Explore the connection between Congo Square and jazz, focusing on key figures like Buddy Bolden.

Reflection Questions

- What did you learn about Congo Square today?
- How does rhythm help people connect with each other?
- Can you think of a place in your community where people gather to share music or stories?

Teacher/Parent Tips

- Encourage participation by keeping the rhythm activity simple and fun.
- Highlight the importance of Congo Square as a cultural melting pot.
- Use positive reinforcement to make students feel confident about their musical contributions.