“Blues is the facts of life.”— Willie Dixon, Chicago bass player, songwriter, producer 1915-1992

BUILD YOUR OWN BLUES TUNE: 3 line 12-bar format

First line: State your problem or situation—happy, sad, angry, funny:
   *My dog ate my homework, please have mercy on me.*
Second line, Say it again, with different emphasis, or add to it:
   *My dog ate my homework, PLEASE have mercy on me.*
Third line: “Solve” your problem or add an insight or punchline:
   *Teacher gonna kill me, think I’m gonna climb a tree.*

WHERE DOES THE BLUES COME FROM?

Blues is a simple, repetitive, everyday music. African Americans in the South created the blues to share what they were going through under the Jim Crow system. The music evolved from earlier work songs and spirituals. It started, as music around the world, with the human voice and a beat. (like hiphop). The songs, like country music, tell personal real-life stories. Blues recording began in the 1920s and peaked commercial on the R&B charts in the 1950s. Gospel music and soul are rooted in blues. As long as there are people, there will be blues artists to sing the stories.

SOUNDS OF BLUES

Blues music combines African rhythm and voice patterns with European instruments and musical scales. Blues has a distinct musical scale, with flatted 3rd, flatted 5th and flatted 7th. Blues musicians improvise, as do jazz artists. Whether the words are happy or sad, blues chords and rhythms have a satisfying, healing quality.

BLUES NAMES TO LOOK UP

Classic blues: Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Tampa Red, Dinah Washington, W.C. Handy
Jump Blues: Louis Jordan, Cab Calloway
Piedmont “folk” blues: Mississippi John Hurt, Archie Edwards, Leadbelly
Chicago Blues: Muddy Waters, Howlin’ Wolf, Jimmy Reed, Eddie Taylor Sr., Sunnyland Slim, Koko Taylor, Willie Dixon, the Kings (BB, Albert, Freddie), Albert Collins
Soul Blues: Little Milton, Johnnie Taylor, Tyrone Davis, Denise LaSalle, Bobby Bland