12-Bar Blues

**Appropriate Levels**: grades 6-8

**Concepts**: melody, harmony, form, style

**Objectives**: create and perform on piano

**National Standards**: 2. Perform on instruments; 3. Improvise melodies; 5. Read music (chord chart).

**Materials**: piano, set of xylophones/bass bars, Autoharp (or other simple accompaniment instrument such as guitar or Casio or Yamaha electronic keyboard with one-note chording feature), recordings of blues (e.g. Louis Armstrong - *Gut Bucket Blues; Porcupine Rock*), 12-bar chord chart written on the board in “Nashville” or staff slash notation.

**Procedure/Sequence**

1. Have students mirror the teacher’s fingers in signaling I, IV, and V chords following a visual chord chart and recorded examples of blues. Monitor and reinforce until all anticipate the teacher and signal on their own.

2. Ask students one at a time in turn to make up a tune using only black piano keys one at a time along with a blues chord progression played by the teacher (see Eb piano-chording pattern), and the remaining class members to show I, IV, or IV on their fingers tracking the chord chart on the board, with a new soloist to play at each repeat of the blues progression. Monitor and affirm correctness (in-tempo, black notes only, one note at a time), acknowledge and encourage (“go ahead, try it”) willingness to explore new ideas, verify and reassure originality, sense and appreciate tunefulness and expressiveness, and notice and point out emotional responses from the student audience.

3. Have students one at a time or in teams identify primary chords in different keys and perform the 12-bar blues progression on an Autoharp or with bass bars & xylophones, with individuals in turn improvising a tune on a pentatonic-scale xylophone or learned instrument or by singing on a neutral syllable (i.e. “doo-doot-doo”), multiple scat syllables (i.e. “zwee-bah-doot-n-doo-zoink”), or words (i.e. “I got the blues…”). Monitor and reinforce correct in-key in-tempo chords and creative improv.

**Key of C**: C C C C F F C C G7 F C C (or G7 to repeat back to the beginning)

**Key of F**: F F F F Bb Bb F F C7 Bb F F (or Bb7)

**Key of G**: G G G G C C G G D7 C G G (or D7)