



The Historic  
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Collection

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# *Shout, Sister, Shout!*

The Boswell Sisters of New Orleans

Piano



Teacher's guide: grade levels 7–9

Number of lesson plans: 4

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## Shout, Sister, Shout!

### The Boswell Sisters of New Orleans

#### Metadata

Grade Levels 7–9

Number of lesson plans: 4



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### Louisiana academic standards and grade-level expectations

**8.81** Explain cultural elements that have shaped Louisiana's state heritage (e.g., festivals, music, dance, food, languages). (H-1D-M6)

#### Common Core state standards

**RI.8.1** Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text

**RI.8.2** Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.

**RI.8.3** Analyze how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events (e.g., through comparisons, analogies, or categories).

**RI.8.4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

**RI.8.5** Analyze in detail the structure of a specific paragraph in a text, including the role of particular sentences in developing and refining a key concept.

**RI.8.6** Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.

**RI.8.7** Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using different mediums (e.g., print or digital text, video, multimedia) to present a particular topic or idea.

**RI.8.8** Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced.

**RI.8.9** Analyze a case in which two or more texts provide conflicting information on the same topic and identify where the texts disagree on matters of fact or interpretation.

**W.8.1** Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

**W.8.2** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

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**Cover:** Boswell Sisters from *Who's Who on the Air*, 1932; magazine published by Ludwig Baumann; *THNOC*, gift of the Boswell Museum of Music, 2011.0315. 147. Backdrop from "Shout, Sister, Shout!" sheet music; *THNOC*, Boswell Sisters Museum Collection, MSS 668, f. 1172.

## Overview

Over the course of four lessons, the students will explore the life and music of the Boswell Sisters and the lasting contributions these pioneers made to American musical culture. Raised in New Orleans, where they received formal lessons in classical music while absorbing the sounds of the city's jazz scene, the Boswell Sisters were among the first stars of radio's golden age, selling out shows nationally and internationally and recording with the biggest names of the 1920s and '30s. Their innovative approach to jazz vocal harmony influenced musicians for decades, from direct successors such as the Andrews Sisters and Ella Fitzgerald to country-music queens the Judds.

## Lesson One

### Objective

In this lesson, students will read about and understand key events in the lives of the Boswell Sisters and the means by which they influenced American culture through their songs. A graphic organizer of critical thinking questions will guide them as they read several narratives from The Historic New Orleans Collection, and they will create a timeline of key events.

### Introduction

The 1920s heralded a dramatic break between America's past and future. Before World War I, the country remained culturally and psychologically rooted in the nineteenth century, but in the 1920s America seemed to break its wistful attachments to the recent past and usher in a more modern era. The most vivid impressions of that era are flappers and dance halls, movie palaces and radio empires, airplanes and automobiles, and Prohibition and speakeasies. Scientists shattered the boundaries of space and time, airplanes made men fly, and women went to work outside of the home. The Boswells grew up in a home in New Orleans that embraced music; their training included private lessons with a professor of classical music and frequent visits with exceptional jazz musicians.

### Materials needed

- Narratives from The Historic New Orleans Collection (5)
- Graphic organizer of critical thinking questions from the narratives
- Timeline

### Procedures

1. Distribute copies of the narratives.
2. The teacher then share reads with the students. This is done by having the students follow along silently while the teacher begins reading aloud. The teacher models prosody, inflection, and punctuation. After a few sentences, the teacher asks the class to join in with the reading. The teacher continues to read along with the students, still serving as the model for the class. This technique will support struggling readers as well as English language learners (ELL).
3. Distribute the graphic organizer of critical thinking questions for the narratives. Model the process for the students by leading the class in completing the first two questions. The teacher may allow students to work in groups of two or three, but each student must complete his or her own answers to the critical thinking questions, and each answer must be based on the narrative texts.
4. The teacher facilitates a class discussion where students share their answers to the questions and develop a clear understanding of the life events and music of the Boswell Sisters.
5. The teacher distributes the timeline to the students, who complete it based on the previous readings and discussions. Students may want to leave some spaces blank because they will add to the timeline at the end of Lesson Two.

## Inspired

Musical trends in New Orleans in the 1910s reflected revolutionary changes underway in American popular entertainment. The French Opera House, a monument to the city's rich classical-music history, still stood at the corner of Bourbon and Toulouse Streets. But in local nightclubs, young jazz artists such as Joe “King” Oliver, Kid Ory, and Nick LaRocca were propagating a new, thoroughly American style of music.

Meanwhile, in theaters across the country, audiences continued to flock to another entertainment staple: the vaudeville show. Traveling troupes of performers—musicians and magicians, acrobats and trained animals—had been enthralling Americans for several decades. It was in this environment of old, new, and popular music that the sound of the Boswell Sisters was born.

In 1914 former vaudevillian Alfred Clyde “A. C.” Boswell brought his family to New Orleans. Trading show business for mainstream respectability, A. C. took a well-paying job at the local offices of the Fleischmann Company, makers of Fleischmann's Yeast, and moved his wife, Meldania, and four children—Clyde Jr., or “Clydie”; Martha; Constance, or “Connie”; and Helvetia, or “Vet”—into a comfortable neighborhood uptown. Guided by their parents' exuberant love of music, the Boswell children would soon bring the family name back into the world of popular entertainment.



The young Boswell sisters performing at home; 1918; photoprint by Charles Franck, photographer; *THNOC*, gift of the Boswell Museum of Music, 2011.0315.93

Music was a constant presence in the Boswells' lives. All the children received formal training in classical music, primarily from noted professor Otto Finck. Martha studied piano, Vet and Clydie, violin, and Connie, cello. Meldania also made sure they were exposed to other forms of music, bringing the children to see the popular African American musicians of the day at the Lyric Theatre and inviting jazz artists such as Santo Pecora, Emmett Louis Hardy, Leon Roppolo, Pinky Vidacovich, and Tony Parenti to visit the Boswell home.

Clydie died in the influenza epidemic of 1918, but the Boswell girls carried on, eventually trading their classical studies for the rapidly growing world of jazz. Martha continued on piano, Vet switched to banjo, and Connie picked up saxophone and guitar. Rather than instrumental work, though, what would soon set them apart was their experimentation with jazz-based vocal harmonies. By the early 1920s they were local celebrities, performing vaudeville-style shows at the Saenger, Palace, and Orpheum theaters and appearing on local radio programs.



Bing Crosby and the Boswell Sisters; 1934; photoprint; THNOC, gift of the Boswell Museum of Music, 2011.0315.112

## *Transformed*

By the mid-1920s vaudeville was at its peak. Tens of thousands of variety acts across the country composed the most ubiquitous form of popular entertainment of its time. In New Orleans, the Orpheum Theatre was the premier vaudeville venue. The sisters performed there in 1925 and caught the attention of a vaudeville talent agency out of Chicago. They soon found themselves maintaining a grueling schedule and performing in towns they had never heard of across Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas.

With the establishment of the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) and the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) in the late 1920s, it became clear that radio was poised to take a big bite out of vaudeville's market share. The Boswell Sisters, whose lively harmonies and interesting song interpretations made them exceptionally listenable, were at the vanguard of this transformation in the entertainment industry.

By 1929 the sisters were living in Los Angeles and had signed a contract with radio station KNX, owned and operated by the Los Angeles *Evening Express* newspaper and broadcast from the Paramount Pictures studios. The Boswells contributed to sponsored variety programs, such as *The Navigator Hour* and *The Paramount Hour*. In 1930 they signed with Warner Brothers Pictures' station KFVB, which would also play a role in the early careers of Bing Crosby, Ronald Reagan, and, later, the Beach Boys.

Though the Boswells' biggest years of success lay ahead of them, their star was on the rise. They made several triumphant visits back to New Orleans and, in 1931, were named Louisiana's official Ambassadors of Harmony by the governor, Huey P. Long.

## Revealed

Radio revealed to the world the Boswell Sisters' rich and complex vocal style, one born of the musical traditions of New Orleans as well as the Boswells' classical training. Their innovative style—full of unpredictable harmonies, vocal mimicry of jazz instrumentation, playful phrasings, and drastic changes in tempo and mood within a song—made them some of the biggest stars of radio's golden age. On popular programs such as *The Camel Pleasure Hour* and *The Woodbury Hour*, they were featured alongside renowned musicians such as Bix Beiderbecke (cornet and piano), Benny Goodman (clarinet), and their longtime friend and collaborator Bing Crosby.

The sisters also made their mark in Hollywood, performing (as themselves) their hit “Crazy People” in the 1932 feature film *The Big Broadcast*, starring Crosby and comedy duo George Burns and Gracie Allen. In *Moulin Rouge* (1934), starring Constance Bennett, they again appeared as themselves, singing “Coffee in the Morning (and Kisses in the Night).”

Their success on air and on screen led to national and international tours and shows at renowned venues such as RKO Keith's Theater in New York City and London's Palladium Theatre. They also landed record contracts with Brunswick, in 1931, and Decca, in 1935, recording with the Dorsey Brothers, Glenn Miller, Artie Shaw, and many other well-respected musicians of the time. In 1935 the Boswells scored a number-one hit with “The Object of My Affection.”

## Radioland

Radio was largely considered a curious novelty when stations were first being established around the country in the early and mid-1920s, but by 1930 it had become a commercialized mass medium with its own pantheon of celebrities. Nationally syndicated programs presented by corporate sponsors created radio stars whose voices became recognizable commodities used to advertise to a rapidly growing listener market. Bing Crosby, for instance, became the voice of Woodbury Facial Soap, and crooner Rudy Vallée wooed the public on behalf of Fleischmann's Yeast.

Accompanying the radio revolution of the early '30s were fan magazines such as *Radio Stars*, *Radio Digest*, and *Radioland*, which featured photographs of popular personalities and details about their private lives. Gossip journalists such as Walter Winchell delved into the alleged personal affairs of the new celebrities. Through his radio show and newspaper column, he ushered in a new—and often unsavory—era of celebrity journalism.

Fan mail and letters to the editor in these pulp publications enabled readers to interact with and feel vested in radio. Modern celebrity was emerging: radio stars were objects of both recognition and aspiration, providing fans with more glamorous, interesting, and dramatic reflections of themselves. This phenomenon would only grow in strength with the rise of film and television.



The Boswell Sisters' cabinet radio; between 1939 and 1940; by Philco Radio and Television Corp., manufacturer; THNOC, gift of the Boswell Museum of Music, 2011.0315.1



Connie Boswell and dog Judy; between 1933 and 1935; photograph; THNOC, gift of the Boswell Museum of Music, 2011.0315.113

## *The Boswell Legacy*

With marriage and family aspirations taking the fore, the Boswell Sisters disbanded in 1936. Though their time in the limelight was relatively brief, the Boswells influenced close-harmony groups and solo artists for decades. The Andrews Sisters, remembered as the preeminent female vocal group of the 1940s, openly admitted to copying the Boswell sound, and Ella Fitzgerald cited Connie Boswell as one of her biggest influences.

As Martha and Vet settled down to raise their families, Connie carried on as a solo act (sometimes spelling her name “Connee”). She married longtime manager Harry Leedy and maintained her celebrity through the 1940s and '50s with such hits as “Moonlight Mood” (1942) and “If I Give My Heart to You” (1954). Since childhood, Connie had been unable to walk. The true cause of the disability has never been confirmed; polio and a childhood accident were both cited in the press. That her career succeeded for so long despite the many difficulties she faced as a disabled woman is an added testament to her talent and drive.

Vet Boswell’s daughter, Chica, loved to hear her mother talk about the sisters’ glory years and, later in life, started documenting their career and collecting ephemera from other Boswell family members. In 1998 Chica, along with her daughter, Kyla Titus, and a team of musicologists, established the Boswell Museum of Music, located in upstate New York, to keep the legacy of the Boswell Sisters alive. After Chica passed away in 2010, Kyla and the board of the Boswell Museum—who had long thought that the contents of the museum should eventually reside in New Orleans, the sisters’ home and source of inspiration—selected The Historic New Orleans Collection to be the trusted caretaker of the Boswells’ priceless legacy.

## CRITICAL THINKING: NARRATIVES

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Cite documents as sources for your answers.*

1. What were the various types and styles of music and entertainment around 1914? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. How did these styles reflect the old and the new—the changes—in America? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Describe the Boswell family that moved to New Orleans in 1914. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Dad's former career: \_\_\_\_\_ Parents loved: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Girls' early musical instruments: Martha: \_\_\_\_\_ Vet: \_\_\_\_\_ Connie: \_\_\_\_\_
6. What exposure did the girls have to other types of music? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Specifically, how did the girls transition from classical music to jazz? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. How were the sisters performing in the early 1920s? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. What was the significance of the sisters' performance in 1925 at the Orpheum Theatre? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. How did the establishment of NBC and CBS affect vaudeville? The Boswell Sisters? Explain. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. What did life in Los Angeles in 1929 mean to the sisters? Be thorough. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. What honor did the sisters receive in 1931? \_\_\_\_\_
13. What did radio reveal about their style? \_\_\_\_\_

14. With whom did they perform for radio? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
15. What was their Hollywood experience? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
16. Successes on radio and screen created what sort of exposure for the sisters? Be thorough. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
17. Describe their record contracts in 1931 and 1935. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
18. What was especially significant about 1935 for the sisters? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
19. What was the impact of nationally syndicated programs for radio? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
20. How did the “modern celebrity” emerge? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
21. What key event in 1936 had an impact on the sisters’ fame? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
22. How did some prominent singers credit the Boswell Sisters with influencing their careers? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
23. Which sister continued her career, and how and why was it so successful? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
24. How did Chica Boswell and Kyla Titus continue the Boswell story? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
25. Using evidence from these texts, list (1) the unusual talents of the sisters that contributed to their success and (2) the reasons they made such an impact on other musicians and on music in general.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
26. How did the development of radio help the popularity of the sisters? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## Lesson Two

### Objective

In this lesson, students will develop a deeper understanding of the flexibility and style of the Boswell Sisters and how these talents strongly influenced later famous singers. Students will read excerpts from a thesis by Kimberly D. Meisten and an essay by Kyla Titus to understand more details about the talents and music of the sisters. They will complete critical thinking questions about each excerpt and make additions to the timeline introduced in Lesson One.

### Introduction

The Meisten thesis is a highly technical, in-depth analysis of the life and music of the sisters. The selected excerpt allows students to gain a deeper understanding of how the unusual talents of the sisters, as well as their flexibility and the emergence of radio, made their influence on the music and culture of America so significant. The Titus essay, written by the granddaughter of one of the sisters, gives students a glimpse into their personal lives; reveals how jazz and blues influenced their style; and suggests how the Boswells' distinctive approach to music and performance had a lasting impact on American music.

### Materials needed

- Excerpts of masters thesis by Kimberly D. Meisten
- Excerpts of essay by Kyla Titus, Boswell granddaughter
- Graphic organizer of critical thinking questions for both excerpts
- Timeline from Lesson One

### Procedures

1. Distribute copies of the excerpts.
2. The teacher then share reads with the students. This is done by having the students follow along silently while the teacher begins reading aloud. The teacher models prosody, inflection, and punctuation. After a few sentences, the teacher asks the class to join in with the reading. The teacher continues to read along with the students, still serving as the model for the class. This technique will support struggling readers as well as English language learners (ELL).
3. Distribute the graphic organizer of critical thinking questions for the excerpts. Model the process for the students by leading the class in completing the first two questions. The teacher may allow students to work in groups of two or three, but each student must complete his own answers to the critical thinking questions, and each answer must be based on the excerpts.
4. The teacher facilitates a class discussion where students share their answers to the questions and develop a clear understanding of the flexibility, talents, and personal influences of the Boswell Sisters.
5. The teacher distributes the timeline from Lesson One to the students and instructs them to make additions from today's lesson.

EXCERPTS FROM

## “The Boswell Sisters in 1920s and 1930s American Musical Culture”

by Kimberly D. Meisten

(MA thesis, State University of New York College at Oneonta/Cooperstown Graduate Program, 1996)

Between 1925 and 1935, the Boswell Sisters developed a jazz-inspired close-harmony style nationally known through radio, records, and live performances. After recording their first disc in 1925, they traveled in vaudeville, arriving in Hollywood in 1929. They began performing regularly on sustaining and sponsored programs on pre-network stations KNX and KFWB. Unlike many vaudevillians, the Boswell Sisters quickly adapted their style to suit radio technology. Their acoustic recording “Nights When I’m Lonely” and the electrically recorded “St. Louis Blues” show how they adapted their vocal technique to the microphone. In 1930 they began their career on national radio, performing on sponsored programs such as *The Chesterfield Hour* and *The Baker Chocolate Hour*. Performing on sponsored programs required them to adapt to the accompanying orchestras and become more time conscious. They seemed to have greater improvisational freedom on sustaining programs, although they needed to be more concerned with performing a greater number of songs.

The Sisters’ exposure on national radio led them to other opportunities, including recordings, theaters, movies, and European tours. One result was stylistic adaptability. Their flexible style is evident in the three renditions of “Heebie Jeebies.” Between 1933 and 1935, as audience tastes changed, the sisters, like other jazz musicians and vocalists, had trouble finding sponsors. They made two European tours, traveled on the vaudeville circuit, appeared in the movies, and recorded discs. Their radio performances were limited to sustaining programs, and by 1935, they appeared more often in a guest capacity.

Yet when the Boswell Sisters disbanded in 1936, they were still incredibly popular. Their unique jazz-inspired close-harmony arrangements inspired black and white performers alike, including the Andrews Sisters, Mel Torme, and Ella Fitzgerald. Mel Torme wrote that Connie Boswell affected him with “her ballads gently realized, wonderful enunciation, patent attention to phrasing and perfect pitch.” The Andrews Sisters confessed: “We copied the Boswell Sisters so much, and they were from New Orleans, that we developed Southern accents. If you listen to our first record, “Bei Mir Bist Du Schoen,” we sound like shrimp trawlers.

Ella Fitzgerald underlined Connie Boswell as her primary inspiration:

Who influenced me? There was only one singer who influenced me. I tried to sing like her all the time because everything she did made sense musically and that singer was Connee Boswell. When I was a girl, I listened to all the singers, black and white, and I know that Connee Boswell was doing things that no one else was doing at the time. You don’t have to take my word for it. Just check the recordings made at the time and hear for yourself.

Although the Boswell Sisters had a relatively brief career, they played an influential role in the development of American popular music. They pioneered close “harmony singing to include blues and jazz, and in effect paved the way to swing.”



Boswell Sisters billboard at the Glasgow, Scotland, Empire Theatre; 1935; photoprint by Bernard Sykes; THNOC, gift of the Boswell Museum of Music, 2011.0315.115

EXCERPTS FROM  
“We’ve Got to Put That Sun Back in the Sky”

by Kyla Titus

(Introductory essay, THNOC exhibition brochure, 2014)

They were not only masters of vocal harmonization but also gifted classical and jazz instrumentalists who could transform a simple tune into an extraordinary arrangement—often with unpredictable changes in tempo, key, and phrasing. Although they could read and write music fluently, they never wrote down any of their arrangements. Their love of improvisation and experimentation embodied the spirit of—and helped to popularize—New Orleans “hot” jazz.

Meldania made certain her children received as much exposure to music as the city could offer, taking them to hear black performers at the Lyric Theatre, which held a series of special whites-only shows called the Midnight Frolics. There, the young Boswells heard singers such as Mamie Smith, the first African American singer to appear on a blues record with the 1920 hit “Crazy Blues.” The Boswell Sisters’ first record, made in March 1925 for the Victor Talking Machine Company, featured the song “I’m Gonna Cry (Cryin’ Blues).” Written by Martha and released under Connie’s name as the primary artist, this song reflects Smith’s jazz and blues influence on the trio: seventeen-year-old Connie belts out the lyrics in a throaty imitation of Smith’s style that sounds more affected than the soulful alto heard on most Boswell records. Connie’s performance led many people to believe that the Boswells were black entertainers, even prompting some promoters to place their records in stores offering black music only.

By 1925 the Boswell Sisters had collected a sizable local following and were in constant demand. They patterned their act after vaudeville, featuring primarily instrumental music as well as variety elements such as tap dancing, by Vet. The girls experimented, trying out new musical sounds and different features in their act. Their music was a mixture of classical, semi-classical (between classical and pop), blues, and modern syncopated music with rapid chord and tempo changes. At this time singing was only a small part of the girls’ routine, as instrumental ensembles predominated. Martha played piano; Connie, saxophone and cello; and Vet, banjo and violin. As time



The Boswell Sisters from *The Big Broadcast*; 1932; photoprint; THNOC, gift of the Boswell Museum of Music, 2011.0315.100

went on, however, the classics faded into the background; the Boswells’ vocal syncopations were clearly becoming audience favorites.

The Boswells’ career as a trio ended somewhat abruptly in 1936, after all three sisters married. Only Connie continued in show business, enjoying a successful solo career through the early 1960s and cementing her additional legacy as one of the first disabled female celebrities of the modern age. Despite the sisters’ brief time in the spotlight, their fresh approach to vocal and instrumental arrangements and mastery of musicianship influenced vocal groups as well as solo artists, past and present. Their admirers included people from all over the world at every level—royalty, political leaders, entertainers, business moguls, and ordinary listeners. All fell under the spell of their musicianship, charm, and uplifting spirit.

CRITICAL THINKING: EXCERPTS

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Using excerpt from the Meisten thesis:**

1. Describe the adaptations the sisters made to become so successful in radio. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What type of performing in their early years helped them make such a successful transition to radio? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What opportunities did radio provide them? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What was an important result of the new opportunities? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Explain specific ways the Boswells influenced later famous singers. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. How did they pave the way to swing? \_\_\_\_\_

**Using excerpt from the Titus essay:**

1. According to Titus, what was unusual about the sisters' style and music? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How did the sisters' mother help them develop their talents? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Why did some people believe the sisters were African American? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What provided a pattern for the sisters' act? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Describe the elements that made their music so unusual and special. \_\_\_\_\_
6. What features of the sisters' music became audience favorites? \_\_\_\_\_
7. What contributed to the ending of the sisters' careers? \_\_\_\_\_
8. What was unusual about Connie's life and her talents? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Using evidence from these texts, list (1) how the sisters' talents contributed to their success and (2) the reasons they made such an impact on other musicians and on music in general. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. How did the development of radio help the popularity of the sisters? \_\_\_\_\_

## Lesson Three

### Objective

In this lesson, students will develop a deeper understanding of the complex musical style of the Boswell Sisters as they closely examine both the music and the words of the group's signature song, "Shout, Sister, Shout!" Students will read and analyze the lyrics; listen for the mood, tone, and rhythm of the music; and evaluate how the signature song reflects the talents and close-harmony musical style of the Boswell Sisters.

### Introduction

The Boswell Sisters received intensive training in classical music and jazz in their home as young girls. They were great improvisers who could take a basic tune and transform it into a fabulous arrangement with unique variations in phrasing, key, and tempo. Their parents often hosted talented guests, such as jazz musicians who performed on clarinet, guitar, drums, saxophone, trumpet, bass, tuba, and banjo.

"Shout, Sister, Shout!" became the Boswell Sisters' theme song for the 1932 *Music that Satisfies* radio show. According to Kyla Titus, the music demonstrates the sisters' complexities—"the sudden shift in tempo, the on and off the beat fluctuations, the smorgasbord of scat, and the range of feeling." This song is one that caused many listeners to assume that the singers were African American.

### Materials needed

- Lyrics to "Shout, Sister, Shout!"
- Recording of "Shout, Sister, Shout!": <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iafM9IN3-kY&feature=kp>
- Graphic organizer for the lyrics
- Graphic organizer for the recording

### Procedures

1. Divide the class into critical-thinking groups of two to three students each.
2. Distribute copies of the lyrics.
3. If the class is able to read this text level, then ask the students to read the text individually; if not, the teacher should share read the document with the students. This is done by having the students follow along silently while the teacher begins reading aloud. The teacher models prosody, inflection, and punctuation. After a few sentences, the teacher asks the class to join in with the reading. The teacher continues to read along with the students, still serving as the model for the class. This technique will support struggling readers as well as English language learners (ELL).
4. Students work in their small groups to complete the graphic organizer for the lyrics.
5. The teacher facilitates a class discussion where students share their interpretations of the lyrics and develop a clear understanding of the messages of the song.
6. The teacher plays the recording of the Boswell Sisters performing "Shout, Sister, Shout!" Students work in their small groups to complete the Graphic Organizer for the Recording.
7. The teacher then leads a class discussion in which the students share their answers to the questions and analyze the lyrics and the music of "Shout, Sister, Shout!"
8. As a summative activity, students compose a short essay in which they analyze the impact of the Boswell Sisters on the music and culture of America in the 1920s and '30s, citing evidence from the texts used in the lessons.

## “Shout, Sister, Shout!”

written by Clarence Williams, 1929

(as recorded by the Boswell Sisters with the Dorsey Brothers Orchestra, April 23, 1931, New York)

If you want your soul set free,  
lift your voice and sing with me  
(scat).

If the Devil grabs your hand,  
Here's one thing that he can't stand,  
(scat).

Walkin' down to the river, sing'n a hallelujah song,  
Oh Lord!  
Up jumps the Devil before you, just keep ploddin' along!

Tell old Satan how you feel,  
Get the Devil off your heel,  
(scat).

Keep your spirit way up high,  
Look up to the sky,  
Stand up and shout “Hallelujah, oh-oh!  
Hallelujah, oh-oh!”

If that old Devil should grab your hand,  
Here's one thing that he can't stand,  
Shout sister, shout sister, shout!  
Oh Lord!  
Shout!  
Oh Lord!

(scat)  
Oh shout, oh shout!  
Oh come on down, just a little bit joy!  
(scat)  
Oh shout, oh sister shout!  
(scat)

(scat)  
Just tell old Satan how you feel,  
Get that old Devil right off your heel!  
Shout sister, shout sister, shout!  
Oh Lord!  
Shout!  
Oh Lord!

LYRICS

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Put each of the lyrics into your own words:*

1. If you want your soul set free,  
lift your voice and sing with me  
(scat).

---



---

If the Devil grabs your hand,  
Here's one thing that he can't stand,  
(scat).

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2. Walkin' down to the river, sing'n a hallelujah song  
Oh Lord!  
Up jumps the Devil before you, just keep ploddin' along!  
Tell old Satan how you feel,  
Get the Devil off your heel,  
(scat).

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3. Keep your spirit way up high,  
Look up to the sky,  
Stand up and shout "Hallelujah, oh-oh!  
Hallelujah, oh-oh!"

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4. If that old Devil should grab your hand,  
Here's one thing that he can't stand,  
Shout sister, shout sister, shout!  
Oh Lord!  
Shout!  
Oh Lord!

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5. (scat)  
Oh shout, oh shout!  
Oh come on down, just a little bit joy!  
(scat)  
Oh shout, oh sister shout!  
(scat)

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6. (scat)  
Just tell old Satan how you feel,  
Get that old Devil right off your heel!  
Shout sister, shout sister, shout!  
Oh Lord!  
Shout!  
Oh Lord!

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Key message of lyrics: \_\_\_\_\_

RECORDING

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Recording of “Shout, Sister, Shout!”**

1. What mood is created by the song? Cite examples. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Describe how the sounds were blended and how this made the Boswell Sisters’ music distinctive. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Cite specific examples of how and why the Boswells were applauded for being a “close-harmony singing group.”

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Give examples of the sisters’ tempo experimentations. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. In what ways does the song foreshadow the rock genre? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. As you listen to “Shout, Sister, Shout!” do you find either the music or the lyrics to be stronger or more influential than the other? Explain. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Objective**

## Lesson Four

In this lesson, students will develop a deeper understanding of the talents of the Boswell Sisters as they closely examine both the music and the words of the song “Heebie Jeebies.” Students will read and analyze the lyrics, listen for the mood, tone, and rhythm of the music, and evaluate how the song illustrates the extraordinary music and contributions of the Boswell Sisters.

### Introduction

The Boswell Sisters received intensive training in classical music and jazz in their home as young girls. They were great improvisers who could take a basic tune and transform it into a fabulous arrangement with unique variations in phrasing, key, and tempo. Their parents often hosted talented guests, such as jazz musicians who performed on clarinet, guitar, drums, saxophone, trumpet, bass, tuba, and banjo. Louis Armstrong performed “Heebie Jeebies” and made it a hit song; the Boswell Sisters recorded it later as a tribute to Armstrong, whom they greatly admired. While the words and harmony of the song were popular, the scats were the distinguishing feature of the performances. According to Armstrong biographer Ricky Riccardi, in his “Wonderful World of Louis Armstrong” blog, the Boswell Sisters became a “nationwide scat-singing sensation hit”—and this song provided an excellent way to demonstrate their talents. “Heebie Jeebies” became known as the Boswell Sisters’ good luck song.

### Materials Needed

- Lyrics to “Heebie Jeebies”
- Recording of “Heebie Jeebies” (Boswell Sisters): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MUB3ZR4F8vw&feature=kp>
- Recording of “Heebie Jeebies” (Louis Armstrong and the Hot Five): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ksmGt2U-xTE>
- Artifacts
- Graphic organizer for “Heebie Jeebies”

### Procedures

Note: Teachers may not have enough time to complete both Lesson Three and Lesson Four. However, if they are able to include both, students should develop a

much deeper understanding of the rich contributions and diverse talents of the Boswell Sisters.

1. Divide the class into critical-thinking groups of two to three students each.
2. Distribute copies of the lyrics.
3. If the class is able to read this text level, then ask the students to read the text individually; if not, the teacher should share read the document with the students. This is done by having the students follow along silently while the teacher begins reading aloud. The teacher models prosody, inflection, and punctuation. After a few sentences, the teacher asks the class to join in with the reading. The teacher continues to read along with the students, still serving as the model for the class. This technique will support struggling readers as well as English language learners (ELL).
4. The teacher plays the recording of the Boswell Sisters performing “Heebie Jeebies.” The teacher asks students what impressed them the most about the recording. Then the teacher plays Louis Armstrong’s recording of “Heebie Jeebies” and asks students to think about similarities and differences between the two recordings.
5. The teacher leads the class in reading the three artifacts.
6. Students work in their small groups to complete the graphic organizer for “Heebie Jeebies.”
7. The teacher then leads a class discussion in which the students analyze the lyrics and the music of “Heebie Jeebies.” As an extension of their work on “Shout, Sister, Shout!” in Lesson Three, students should reflect on the uniqueness of this “good luck” song, especially examining the scats. Students should develop a deeper understanding of the talent and flexibility of the Boswell Sisters and the contributions they made to the music and culture of America.
8. As a summative activity, students should compose a short essay in which they analyze the impact of the Boswell Sisters on the music and culture of America in the 1920s and ’30s, citing evidence from the texts used in the lessons.

# HEEBIE JEEBIES

An Eccentric Creation Originated by **FLOYD DU PONT**

## DANCE

Introduced by **TINAH TWEEDIE**  
(Danceuse Supreme)

Under Personal Direction of Mr. "Lou" Bolton and Mr. Floyd Du Pont

The HEEBIE JEEBIES DANCE was originated by Mr. Du Pont to be used primarily as a stage attraction. However, its immediate popularity and ready acceptance by professional dancers throughout the theatrical world prompted him to simplify it to a degree where it may now be enjoyed and easily mastered by everyone. Simply follow carefully the instructions and illustrations as shown below, all of which have been compiled and arranged under the personal supervision of Mr. Du Pont himself.



1. The Get Off



2. The Stomp Off



3. The Fling Off

In describing the following routine, the basic steps of the HEEBIE JEEBIES DANCE, the letter abbreviations are used, i. e., R—right, L—left, RF—right foot, LF—left foot. While practicing, always count the musical beats to each measure, i. e., 1—2—3—4, in time to the music. In case a half beat is indicated, the word AND is used in counting, i. e., 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and. To obtain the right tempo (time) for the HEEBIE JEEBIES DANCE, adjust the speed regulator of your phonograph to 90 (ninety revolutions of the turn table to the minute) as shown on the dial; then practice counting, as shown above, in strict tempo to the music. Do this until you have perfectly synchronized your counting to the exact time of the music. DO NOT attempt any of the steps of the HEEBIE JEEBIES DANCE until you have acquired the knack of counting, as this is the one thing that all professional dancers coach themselves in before attempting any new dance, as it is the only means of keeping the body and feet moving in exact rhythm to the music. You may obtain the HEEBIE JEEBIES record at all music stores or write to the CONSOLIDATED MUSIC PUBLISHING HOUSE, 229 West Washington St., Chicago, Ill. Just ask for OKEH RECORD No. 8360, as this is the record Mr. Du Pont used in casting the HEEBIE JEEBIES DANCE.

1. **THE GET-OFF:** In starting this first step, stand squarely with both feet flat on the floor, position of the body as shown in illustration No. 1. Start with a "push step" to L. with RF. (see RF. of Miss Tweedie in illustration No. 51) as you would start a Hula push-away step, counting ONE for the first beat. Next knock knees together, raising on toes, throwing heels forward and outward, counting TWO for the second beat. On THIRD beat, repeat Hula push-away step once more, then knock knees together again, counting four for FOURTH beat. These two movements may be repeated as often as desired.

2. **THE STOMP-OFF:** On first beat stomp on LF. On second beat kick RF. across body to L.; at the same time stomp on LF. On third beat place RF. back to R. side and stomp. Here the third beat acquires a one-half beat, on which stomp with LF. On fourth beat stomp with RF. Again on the fourth beat a one-half beat is necessary to complete the movement, on which stomp with LF. Stomp feet as in illustration No. 2, counting for whole step and half steps as follows: 1—2—3 AND 4 AND, etc., as often as desired.

3. **THE FLING-OFF:** Stomp with LF. on the first beat; at the same time swing RF. up and in back as in illustration No. 3, both movements done simultaneously while counting ONE. On second beat reverse same two movements, stomping on RF. and flinging LF. up and in back. On the third beat stomp on RF. and swing LF. in front. On fourth beat continue into count by bringing same foot to back of R. leg across body to R. side, finishing as in illustration No. 4. The third and fourth beats of this step are executed exactly as in the HIGHLAND FLING.

4. **THE HEEBIE-OFF:** The next is a combination step done in three movements, each movement requiring three measures while counting 1—2—3—4. (A) First beat, stomp on LF. Second beat, kick RF. across body to L.; at the same time stomp on LF. Third beat, knock knees together, starting as in illustration No. 1. Fourth beat, knock knees together again. (B) First beat, stomp on RF. Second beat, swing LF. back of RF. and stomp. Third beat, throw weight on LF., stomp RF. to R. side. Fourth beat, throw weight on RF., stomping with LF. forward. (C) First beat, stomp RF. back to R. side. Second beat, stomp LF. forward, throw weight forward and stomp with RF. Fourth beat, stomp LF. forward in "rocking chair" fashion as shown in illustration No. 3.

5. **THE JEEBIE-OFF:** This step, like No. 4, is also a combination one of four movements. (A) On both first and second beats RF. stomps twice. On third beat cross RF. back of LF. and stomp. Here the third beat acquires a one-half beat, on which throw weight to RF. and stomp LF. to L. Fourth beat, throw weight to LF., stomp on RF. forward and R. Here another half beat is necessary, on which throw weight on RF. and stomp LF. to L. with arms as in position as shown in illustration No. 4. (B) For the next three measures reverse (A) movements, counting the while 1—2—3 AND 4 AND, starting 1—2 on LF. stomps, but with hands in position as in illustration No. 3. (C) Repeat the entire (A) movement. (D) Take position as in illustration No. 1 and on first beat knock knees together. On second beat, knock knees again. Third beat, stomp on LF. Fourth beat, kick RF. to L. across body and stomp. Here a one-half beat is again necessary, on which stomp with LF. when coming back into place. Counting on this movement 1—2—3—4 AND 3.

6. **THE BLOW-OFF:** Take position as in illustration No. 1, RF. to R. side, LF. stretched to extreme L. hand R. knee, hands and arms in same position as in illustration No. 1. On first beat lift L. hand and arm up, R. hand and arm down, squaring elbows. Alternate position of hands and arms with alternating stomps, maintaining the original posture of body while traveling to the R. Stomp on each beat till finish 1—2—3—4. Remember to change position of hands and arms on each beat.



4. The Heebie Off



5. The Jeebie Off



6. The Blow Off

**NOTE**—The word STOMP as used throughout the instructions, is obtained by a distinct flat footed beat on the floor, using all the pressure of the body weight to produce as much stomp sound as possible. At all times during the dance regardless of the position of the hands and arms, the fingers and wrists should vibrate similar to a Hula effect. Further information and more detailed instructions may be obtained by writing to

**Consolidated Music Publishing House—Consolidated Bldg., 229 W. Washington St.**

Chicago Attention **"LOU" FLOYD BOLTON & DU PONT** Illinois

## “Heebie Jeebies”

Transcribed from vocals by Louis Armstrong, recorded 2/26/26,  
From Louis Armstrong, Hot Fives & Hot Sevens, the 25 Greatest; Living Era AJA 5171.

Say, I've got the heebies,  
I mean the jeebies,  
Talking about  
The dance, the heebie jeebies,  
Do, because they're boys,  
Because it pleases me to be joy!

Say, don't you know it?  
You don't know how, don't be blue,  
Someone will teach you;  
Come on, and do that dance,  
They call the heebie jeebies dance,  
Yes, ma'am,  
Papa's got the heebie jeebies dance!

Skatting...

Say, come on, now, and do that dance,  
They call the heebie jeebies dance,  
Sweet mama!  
Papa's got to do the heebie jeebies dance!

Spoken:

Wooh! Got the heebie jeebies!  
Whatcha doin' with the heebies?  
I just have to have the heebies!

**Artifact 1**

Quote from “Jazz on a High Note”; interview with Louis Armstrong; *Esquire*, Dec. 1951

“[W]hen I dropped the paper, I immediately turned into the horn and started to scatting. Just as nothing had happened. When I finished the record I just knew the recording people would throw it out. And to my surprise they all came running out of the controlling booth and said ‘Leave that in.’ My, my, I gave a big sigh of relief. And sure enough—they did publish ‘Heebie Jeebies’ the same way it was mistakenly recorded.”

**Artifact 2**

Quote from *Satchmo: The Genius of Louis Armstrong*; by Gary Giddins; De Capo Press, 2001

“Armstrong always insisted that the sheet music slipped from the stand and he started scatting to save the take. His unforgettable vocal is the high point of an otherwise uninspired performance, and it’s hard to believe he didn’t know exactly what he was doing. That chorus did more than introduce a language of nonsense syllables that jazz singers could use when the song’s lyric proved too constricting; it embodied a joyous, vernacular, and convincing attitude that complimented the spontaneous nature of the new music.”

**Artifact 3**

Quote from Louis Armstrong letter to an unidentified friend

“I am now sitting home in my dining room with some of the folks at home and we are listening to the Radio. A swell program is now in session. The Three Keys are now getting away ‘righteously’. Late that Cats are after the Mills Brothers own hearts. But I am still Crazy over those Boswell Sisters. Bless their hearts. They are from my home town, you know? Fine Girls. They think I am the Last word. They played here at the Chicago Theatre the same week we played the Palace Theatre.”

Louis Armstrong, writing from Chicago to an unidentified friend (“Gate”); April 5, 1933; <http://jazzlives.wordpress.com/2012/12/09/fine-girls-really-too-tight-i-am-going-to-try-so-hard-to-dream-of-you-profiles-in-history-louis-and-billie/>

“Heebie Jeebies” sheet music;  
*THNOC, William Russell Jazz Collection,*  
*MSS 526, f. 892; 92-48-L.109*

## "HEEBIE JEEBIES" AND ARTIFACTS

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Using "Heebie Jeebies" and Artifacts:

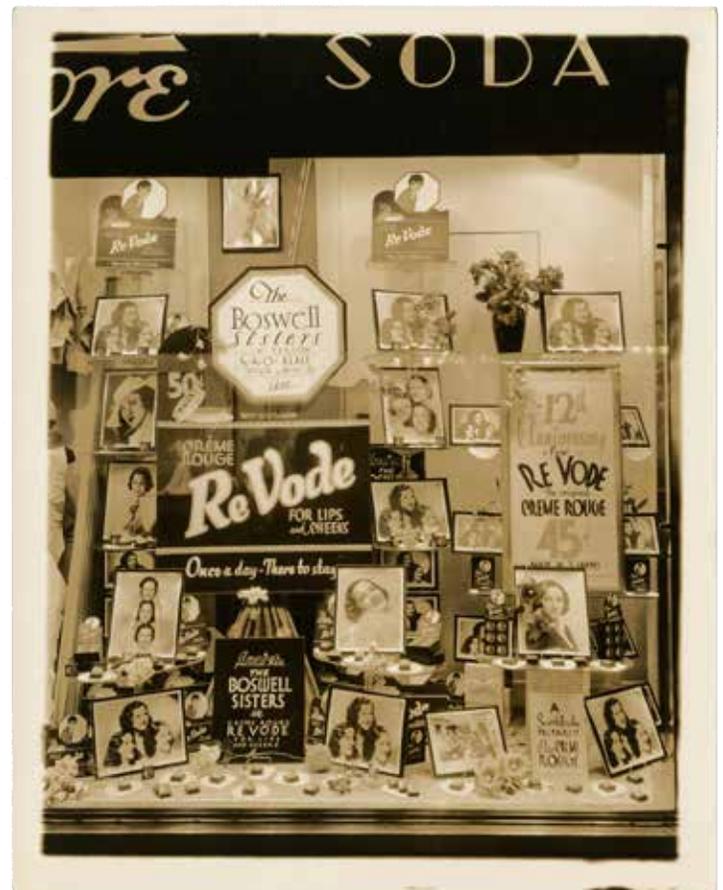
1. What thoughts come to your mind when you hear the term "heebie jeebies?"  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. How do the "heebie jeebies" make the writer feel, and why?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What message do you get from the lyrics?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What mood is created by the lyrics? Explain. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What impact does the scatting have on you? Why? Why do you think the performers used scatting?  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What value did Armstrong give to the scatting in his comments (artifacts 1 and 2)?  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. What mood is created by the song? Cite examples.  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Describe how the music of the sisters was extraordinary in the way the sounds were blended. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. How did your analysis of the song change when you heard it (instead of just reading the lyrics)?  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. As you listen to "Heebie Jeebies," do you find either the music or the lyrics to be stronger or more influential than the other? Explain.  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. What differences, if any, did you notice in the recordings by the Boswells and Louis Armstrong? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. Did the Boswells' recording accomplish its purpose of honoring Louis Armstrong? Explain. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



Boswell Sisters reception at the New Orleans Athletic Club; 1932; photoprint by Leon Trice;  
THNOC, gift of the Boswell Museum of Music, 2011.0315.102



Boswell Sisters receiving *New York Daily Mirror* trophy; 1932; photoprint;  
THNOC, gift of the Boswell Museum of Music, 2011.0315.101



ReVode Creme Rouge store-window display; between 1934 and 1935; photoprint;  
THNOC, gift of the Boswell Museum of Music, 2011.0315.116.