

Blues Music

The first Blues singers were African Slaves. Their music grew out of **despair** of slavery. Even after their release the slaves were still held down by **appalling** poverty, and **deprived** of any kind of **privilege**. For many this 'freedom' was worse than the slavery.



When the slaves were set free in 1865, they faced poverty and homelessness. The nightmare of slavery was over, but black people were often denied jobs and mistreated in other ways, as this song tells us:

*I been hurt an' mistreated
'till I done made up my mind.
I been hurt an' mistreated
'till I done made up my mind.
Gonna leave dis ol' country
An' all my troubles behind.*

These words come from a blues song. 'Singing the blues' has always been a way for black Americans to tell of the unhappy things in their lives. Whatever the notes of the tunes, all Blues songs are based on the same set of three **chords**.



Blues

The most common form of Blues is the 12 bar Blues. It is called this because of the length of the music is twelve bars, and it also fits with the typical Blues lyrics. Whatever tune is used, the **harmonies** stay more or less the same. This means the tunes are always similar. It also means that they can be **improvised**.



Task: Listen to your teacher play the 12 bar blues. Work out which chords they are playing. [Hint—they are all Primary chords.]

Glossary

Despair	Having no hope
Appalling	Terrible, bad, unpleasant
Deprived	Lacking money and/or love
Privilege	Having advantages
Harmonies	Musical sounds that produce chords
Improvisation	To make the music up as you go along. Create 'on the spot'.

Answer the following questions in full sentences.

1. Why was freedom worse than slavery for many of the black Americans?
2. When were the slaves set free?
3. What do blues songs express?
4. What is a chord?
5. What are the 12 bar blues?
6. What does the musical term improvisation mean, and why is this important in Blues music?