

UNDERSTANDING THE 12 BAR BLUES

The most common musical form of blues is the 12-bar blues. The term "12-bar" refers to the number of measures, or musical bars, used to express the theme of a typical blues song. Nearly all blues music is played to a 4/4 time signature, which means that there are four beats in every measure or bar and each quarter note is equal to one beat.

A 12-bar blues is divided into three four-bar segments. A standard blues progression, or sequence of notes, typically features three chords based on the first (written as I), fourth (IV), and fifth (V) notes of an eight-note scale. The I chord dominates the first four bars; the IV chord typically appears in the second four bars and the V chord is played in the third four bars.

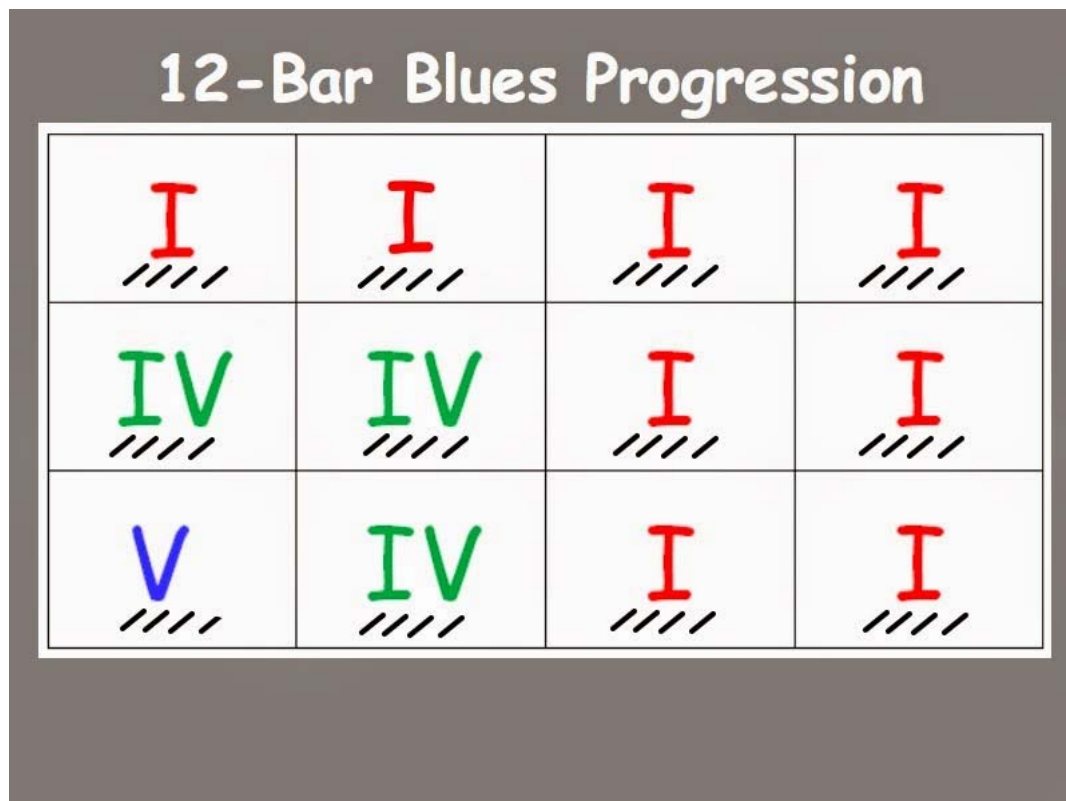
The blues can be played in any key. In whatever key you are in, 12-bar blues uses the same basic sequence of I, IV, and V chords. It is most easily thought of as three 4-bar sections - the first 4, the middle 4, and the last 4 bars.

The first 4 bars just use the I chord - **I, I, I, I**.

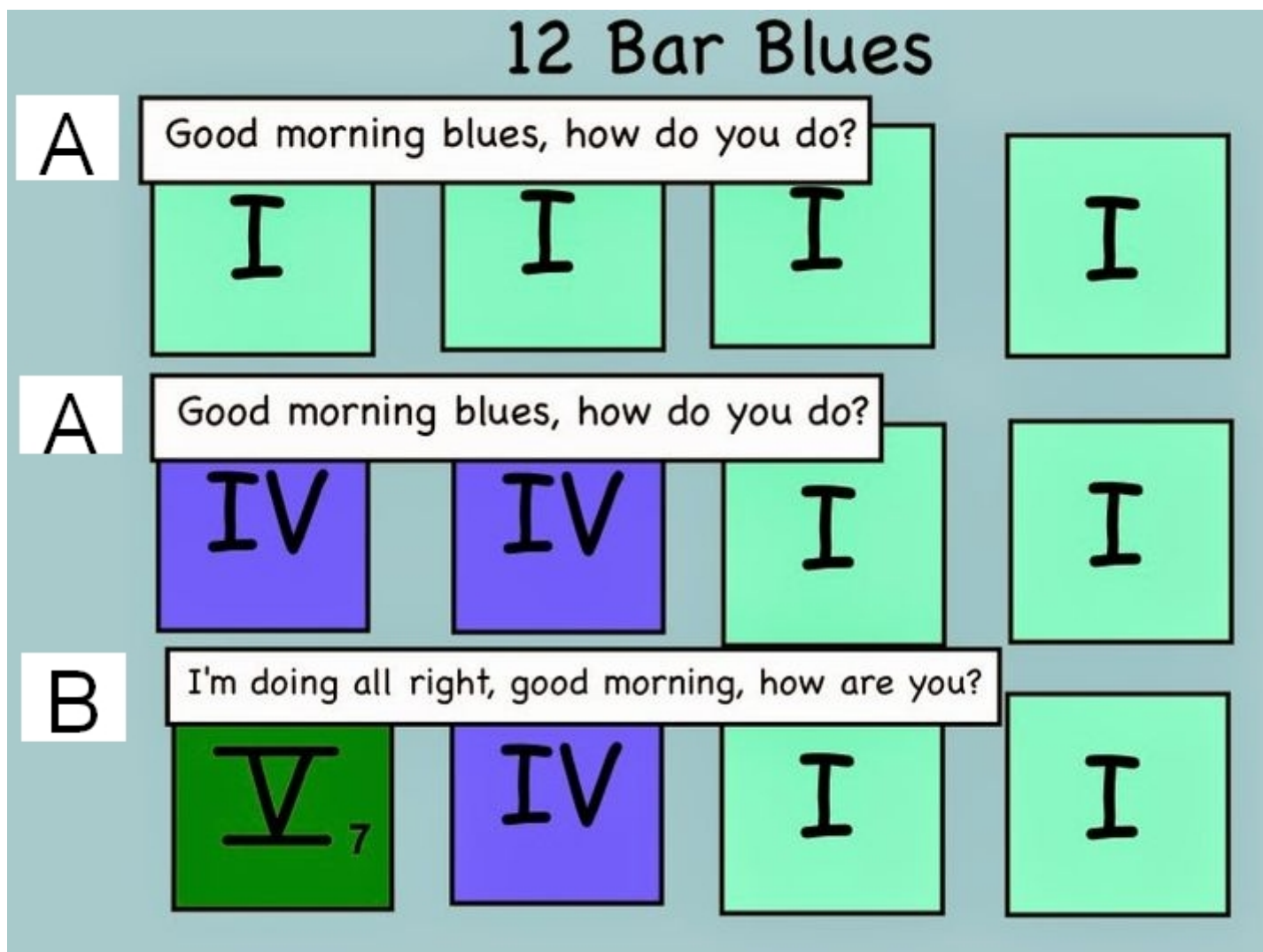
The middle 4 bars go **IV, IV, I, I**.

And the last 4 bars go **V, IV, I, I**. Then you repeat the whole thing again.

So, the basic 12-bar sequence looks like this:



The lyrics of a 12-bar blues song often follow what's known as an AAB pattern. "A" refers to the first and second four-bar verse, and "B" is the third four-bar verse. In a 12-bar blues, the first and second lines are repeated, and the third line is a response to them—often with a twist.



In each 12-bar stanza, the third four-bar segment, serves to resolve the previous four-bar segments. The resolution may signal the end of the song or set up another stanza. If the song continues, the transition to the next stanza is known as the turnaround.

Not all blues songs follow the 12-bar format, but by understanding this basic musical framework, the listener will gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for all blues music.

NAME _____ DATE _____

9 / 10 POP BAND

Blues Lyrics

Working in pairs, choose one of the first lines below to write your own Blues verse. Remember the first two lines are the same and the third line answers, deepens or resolves the issue.

- ♪ I woke up this morning and looked around for my shoes
- ♪ I don't know what love is but it sure is driving me mad
- ♪ I wish I was fishin' a way on the ocean deep
- ♪ When I went out this morning the rain it was pouring down
- ♪ There's two things got me puzzled, two things I can't stand
- ♪ Sitting in my car waiting for the lights to change
- ♪ Got a new puppy gonna name him

FACT FILE:

ERIC CLAPTON



Eric Patrick Clapton, CBE (born 30 March 1945) is an English blues-rock guitarist and singer-songwriter. Clapton is the only person who has been inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame three times; as a solo performer, as well as a member of rock bands the Yardbirds and Cream. Throughout his career, Clapton has been viewed by critics and fans alike as one of the most important and influential guitarists of all time, Clapton was ranked fourth in *Rolling Stone* magazine's list of the "100 Greatest Guitarists of All Time" and #53 on their list of the "Immortals: 100 Greatest Artists of All Time". In 2010, Clapton was ranked #4 on *Gibson's* Top 50 Guitarists of All Time.

Although Clapton has varied his musical style throughout his career, it has always remained grounded in the blues; despite this focus, he is credited as an innovator in a wide variety of genres. These include blues-rock (with John Mayall & the Bluesbreakers and The Yardbirds) and psychedelic rock (with Cream). Clapton's chart success was not limited to the blues, with chart-toppers in Adult contemporary ("Tears in Heaven") and reggae (Bob Marley's "I Shot the Sheriff"; he is often credited for bringing reggae and Bob Marley to the mainstream). Two of his most successful recordings were the hit love song "Layla", which he played with the band Derek and the Dominos, and Robert Johnson's "Crossroads", which has been his staple song since his days with Cream.

FACT FILE:

MA RAINEY



Ma Rainey, born Gertrude Pridgett, started her career early. She was about 14 when she began to perform with black minstrel troupes in roaming "tent shows" at the turn of the century. Minstrel shows are most often perceived as white performers wearing blackface to perform race-based material, but there was also an extensive minstrel circuit of black performers. Her big, deep voice, unusual in a girl so young, made her a popular attraction of almost any show she joined. Eventually, just barely 20, she married a fellow performer named Will Rainey and they joined F.S. Wolcott's Rabbit Foot Minstrels.

Ma Rainey was an eye-catching performer. Although not a conventionally attractive woman, she sported wild horsehair wigs on stage and wore gold coins around her neck. She carried an ostrich plume and had capped gold teeth that would flash when she sang. For all of her visual appeal, however, what most captured audiences' attention was her voice. When she sang a "moaning" song, which would soon be referred to as blues, she could captivate a room in no time at all. She is widely recognized as the first great female blues vocalist.

FACT FILE:

HOWLIN' WOLF



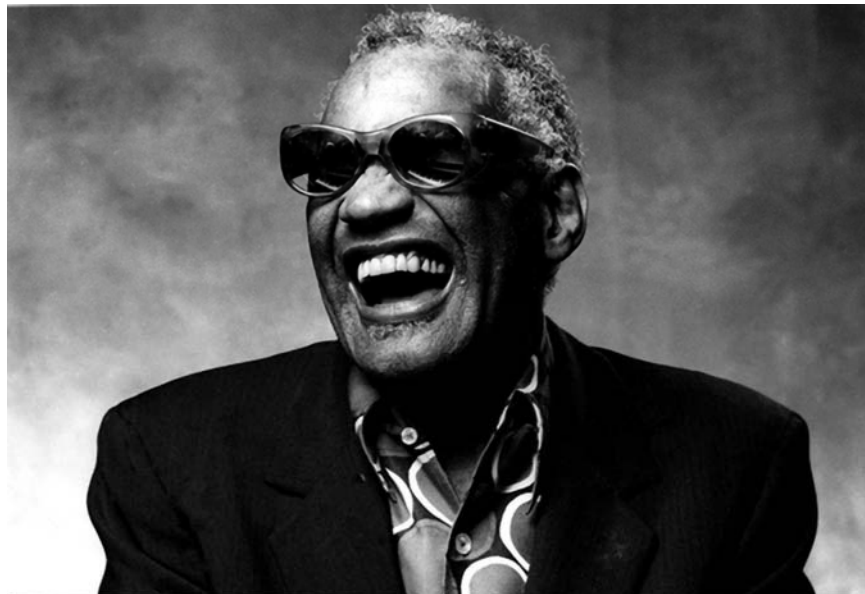
Chester Arthur Burnett, who would become iconic blues musician Howlin' Wolf, was born on June 10, 1910, in the rural region of West Point, Mississippi . He received a guitar from his father when he was 18 and started to actively study and perform the blues. Burnett learned his craft from renowned bluesmen like Charley Patton and Sonny Boy Williamson.

Wolf generally accompanied himself at performances with a guitar and harmonica, and he opted to form a band, the House Rockers, in 1948. Wolf was a large, statuesque man who had a forceful, animated presence on stage and who let loose with a rich, textured vocal style. His hits include "Smokestack Lightnin'," "Moanin' at Midnight" and "Sitting on Top of the World."

Wolf traveled to the U.K. to record his 1971 album, *The London Sessions*, which featured background support from Eric Clapton and Ringo Starr. Wolf died on January 10, 1976, at the age of 65. He was posthumously inducted into the Blues Foundation Hall of Fame in 1980 and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1991.

FACT FILE:

RAY CHARLES



Ray Charles Robinson (September 23, 1930 - June 10, 2004), professionally known as **Ray Charles**, was an American singer, songwriter, musician and composer, who is sometimes referred to as "The Genius". He pioneered the genre of soul music during the 1950s by combining rhythm and blues, gospel, and blues styles into the music he recorded.

Charles was blind from the age of seven. Charles cited Nat King Cole as a primary influence, but his music was also influenced by jazz, blues, rhythm and blues, and country artists of the day, including Art Tatum, Louis Jordan, Charles Brown and Louis Armstrong.

In 2004, *Rolling Stone* ranked Charles at number ten on their list of the "100 Greatest Artists of All Time", and number two on their November 2008 list of the "100 Greatest Singers of All Time"

His style and success in the genres of rhythm and blues and jazz had an influence on a number of highly successful artists, including Elvis Presley, Aretha Franklin, Stevie Wonder, Van Morrison and Billy Joel.

Some of his best known songs include "Hit the Road Jack", "Unchain my Heart" and "Georgia on my Mind".

FACT FILE:

ROBERT JOHNSON



Robert Leroy Johnson (May 8, 1911 – August 16, 1938) was an American blues singer and musician. His landmark recordings from 1936–1937 displayed a remarkable combination of singing, guitar skills, and songwriting talent that have influenced generations of musicians. Johnson's shadowy, poorly documented life and death at age 27 have given rise to much legend, including a Faustian myth.

Johnson's songs, vocal phrasing and guitar style have influenced a broad range of musicians; Eric Clapton has called Johnson "the most important blues singer that ever lived" Johnson was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as an "Early Influence" in their first induction ceremony in 1986. He was ranked fifth in *Rolling Stone's* list of 100 Greatest Guitarists of All Time.

FACT FILE:

JOE COCKER



John Robert "Joe" Cocker, OBE (20 May 1944 - 22 December 2014) was an English rock, blues and soul singer and musician who came to popularity in the 1960s. Powerful, raw, and full of anguish, Joe Cocker's voice was perfectly suited to sing the blues, and it was by doing so that he became well known in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Born into a working-class family, Cocker studied plumbing at a trade school and worked at that profession for several years before his musical efforts began to pay off. As a teen, he was heavily influenced by the music of Ray Charles, which led him to begin playing harmonica in a local group, "The Cavaliers". When "The Cavaliers" reorganized and became "Vance Arnold and The Avengers", Cocker was transformed into the lead vocalist.

After a downhill slide and retirement from performing in the early 1980's, his 1987 cover of "*Unchain My Heart*" re-established him as an admirable interpreter of grittier material. The gist of the album was to pay homage to Cocker's primary vocal influence, Ray Charles, and to a large extent, Cocker succeeded in harnessing his voice to the rhythm-and-blues styles selected for the recording.

Throughout a career blessed with soaring heights and cursed with debilitating lows, Cocker has continuously sought out material from the best songwriters in a wide variety of genres.