

Handout - AAB form in Blues Lyrics

Blues can come in many shapes. Some Blues are instrumental. Sometimes a vocalist sings lyrics that are more conversational, like they are speaking to a friend or sharing their inner thoughts aloud. Howlin' Wolf's 1964 performance of "Smokestack Lightning" is an example of this kind of Blues.

"Smokestack Lightning" (as sung by Howlin' Wolf)

Whoa-oh, the train I ride on, whoa-oh, the engine shine like gold
Whoa-oh, the train I ride on, whoa-oh, the engine shine like gold
Whooo, whoo, whoo, just like gold

The lyrics of many Blues songs are composed using an AAB pattern. Each verse is 3 lines in length. You can think of them as a poetic form with a predictable rhyme scheme. A rhyme scheme is a structure that helps us to know what is coming next. In AAB form, the first two lines are identical and the third line completes the thought. "Smokestack Lightning" is an example of AAB form as is "Runaway Blues" by Ma Rainey (1886-1939), an architect of the Blues from Georgia.

"Runaway Blues" (as sung by Ma Rainey)

A: *I'll run away tomorrow they don't mean me no good*
A: *I'll run away tomorrow they don't mean me no good*
B: *I'm gonna run away hafta leave this neighborhood*

The Blues are the foundation of many Black American music styles that would come later, including Jazz, Gospel, Rhythm and Blues, Rock and Roll, and Funk. Billie Holiday (1915-1959), a prominent Jazz vocalist famous for her recordings of "God Bless the Child" and "Strange Fruit", also recorded "Stormy Blues."

Refer to "Runaway Blues" to label the AAB form in the lyrics of "Stormy Blues".

"Stormy Blues" (as sung by Billie Holiday)

_____ *When it rains in here it's storming on the sea*
_____ *When it rains in here it's storming on the sea*
_____ *Every time I come here everything happens to me*