

The Lied, the Spiritual, and Marian Anderson

Lesson Type: Humanities

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This lesson plan is geared towards a fifth grade level, but may be adapted for use by any age group. It meets the following National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies (Middle Grades):

Theme: Culture

- Compare similarities and differences in the ways groups, societies and cultures meet human needs and concerns
- Explain and give examples of how language, literature, the arts, architecture, other artifacts, traditions, beliefs, values, and behaviors contribute to the development and transmission of culture;
- Articulate the implications of cultural diversity, as well as cohesion, within and across groups

Theme: Time, Continuity and Change

- Develop critical sensitivities such as empathy and skepticism regarding attitudes, values, and behaviors of people in different historical contexts

Theme: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

- Demonstrate an understanding of concepts such as role, status, and social class in describing the interactions of individuals and social groups
- Identify and analyze examples of tensions between belief systems and government policies and laws

Theme: Power, Authority, and Governance

- Explain and apply concepts such as power, role, status, justice, and influence to the examination of persistent issues and social problems

Theme: Global Connections

- Describe instances in which language, art, music, belief systems, and other cultural elements can facilitate global understanding or cause misunderstanding

Standards taken from: *Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies*. National Council for the Social Studies, April 1994. ISBN 0-87986-065-0

Goals:

1. Students will develop an appreciation for Marian Anderson's artistry and her contributions to American music.
2. Students will gain familiarity with two types of songs performed by Marian Anderson: spirituals and lieder.

Objectives:

1. Discuss the similarities and differences between spirituals and lieder (compare and contrast).
2. Discuss the use of symbolism and language in spirituals.
3. Discuss the use of language to show personification in lieder.
4. Discuss the historical development of spirituals and lieder.

Resources:

- Transparencies of the lyrics of the two songs (provided below)
- Overhead projector
- Recordings of Marian Anderson singing the two songs: "Sterne mit den goldnen Füsschen" and "Deep River."

Skills Learned:

- Students will be able to interpret the meaning of the poems and songs.
- Students will learn the characteristics of the two types of song.
- Students will learn to understand figurative language in poetry and song.

Approximate Time required: 45 minutes

Lesson:

Stars in the Golden Heaven by Hugo Wolf (1860 - 1903), composed in 1880

Poem by Heinrich Heine (1797-1856)

German title: “*Sterne mit den goldnen Füßchen*”

Stars move shyly through the heavens,
None may hear their footfall light;
Fearful are they, Earth may waken, sleeping in the lap of night.
List’ning stand the woods in silence, ev’ry leaf an open ear!
And the mountain’s drowsy shadow points across the dreaming mere.
But what is that, penetrates my heart, that song that fills the vale?
Is it my beloved’s voice that calls, or but the nightingale?

Deep River, Traditional African-American Spiritual

arr. by Harry Thacker Burleigh, (1866-1949)

see <http://www.jass.com/spirituals.html> for a short biography of Harry Thacker Burleigh.

Deep river, my home is over Jordan,
Deep river, Lord, I want to cross over into campground.
Oh, don’t you want to go to that gospel feast,
That promised land where all is peace?
Oh don’t you want to go to that promised land,
That land where all is peace?
Deep river, my home is over Jordan,
Deep river, Lord, I want to cross over into campground.

Quote from Harry Thacker Burleigh:

“...through all these songs there breathes a hope, a faith in the ultimate justice and brotherhood of man. The cadences of sorrow invariably turn to joy, and the message is ever manifest that eventually deliverance from all that hinders and oppresses the soul will come and man - every man - will be free.”

- Discuss unfamiliar words, such as *mere* and *vale* from the Heine lyrics.
- Discuss other important terms, such as the following:
Lieder: German art songs from the **German Romantic** period during the 19th century. These Romantic-era composer and poets wrote works that celebrated and glorified the natural world.
- Display the Wolf poem. Read it aloud several times as students follow the text.

- What reaction do the students have to the lyrics? Discuss:
 - What is the poet (lyricist) trying to say?
 - To what does the poet compare his beloved's voice?
 - What characteristics does he give to the stars, the woods, and the leaves?
 - The poet has attributed to human characteristics to nature. What are they?
 - What feelings or emotions does this poem awaken?
- Play Marian Anderson singing the lied. Ask your students:
 - How does the music increase or enhance the meaning of the text?
 - How does the music portray the feelings in the poem?
- Display Deep River.
- Read aloud several times as the students follow along. Ask your students:
 - Who were the first people to sing this song?
 - Why are the words "deep river" repeated several times?
 - Where is the Jordan River and why is it used in this song?
 - Why are the singers trying to cross over the Jordan River?
 - What does "Promised Land" mean?
 - Is this song really religious?
 - Do you think that this song might have been masking another, hidden, meaning?
 - Why did most of the songs sung by slaves use religious images?
- Discuss the importance of biblical imagery in slave culture. Many enslaved African-Americans identified with the biblical Israelites, who were once enslaved by the Egyptians. We can also hear biblical imagery in the spiritual "Go Down, Moses" (sometimes called "Let My People Go").
- Play recording.
- How does "Deep River" compare to the Wolf?

Extension of Activity:

- Research the life of Harry Thacker Burleigh
- Have your students learn these songs and sing them.

Closure/Reflection:

Have students copy the poems into poetry notebooks and record their personal reflections through illustrations and writing.

Assessment:

Have students read text to "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" and write a personal reflection in their poetry notebooks. Some potential questions for them to consider:

- What is this song really about?
- What kind of feelings does the singer have about home?
- What is "home" to you?

