

Sample Lesson Plan Using Margaret Bonds, "I, Too"

This lesson was for a Music Theory 4 class, during a unit on referential collections. Students were studying diatonic modes; that was one of the guiding focal points of the class.

This class was instructed synchronously over Zoom.

I had students listen to the piece before class and spend about 5 minutes jotting down their initial thoughts and reactions. I had already read through them by the start of class and had a general idea of what students were hearing and thinking.

min. 0-5

Brief intro to the composer and the song set

Listen once to the piece

(I used and really love this recording:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q50nDwr7t4I>)

min. 5-15

"Big Picture" considerations:

- Relationship between the music and text
- Interplay between the voice and the piano
- How does Bonds speak to/illuminate the topic of race in her setting?

Set up the D Aeolian context

- What is the impact of the absence of a leading tone?
- What happens to the V chord without a raised $\hat{7}$? Can some other harmony 'step in' to take its place?
- Does the C-sharp appear elsewhere disguised as something else?

min. 15-30: Breakout Rooms

All students worked off of a Google Doc where I had already posted some prompts, which I'll put below. This, of course, could easily be done in the classroom as a small group activity.

Prompts:

Talk about the relationship between the music and the text. How does the music reflect the narrative? (Some things you might consider are harmonic consonance/dissonance, texture, rhythmic dissonance, use of modes and/or key centers.)

How do you think that Bonds' choice of the Aeolian mode impacts the opening measures? More specifically, how does the absence of a leading tone alter the minor-mode sound? Are there implications for other harmonies?

How is chromaticism treated? Are there passages that are "crunchier" than others? How does that pair with the overall narrative of the piece?

min. 30-50: Large group wrap-up

I'll summarize the highlights from the discussions I had with students when I brought them back from their Breakout Rooms:

- The C major triad stands in as a dominant chord for this piece.
- Piano and vocal lines have a unique, almost independent relationship.
- Chromaticism increases in moments when the singer reflects on the racial injustice he/she experiences. Flatted pitches seem to symbolize those injustices directly.
- Aeolian sounds more melancholy than harmonic minor; the lack of a raised leading tone is especially apparent at the very end of the piece.
- The harmony at m. 3.3 is like a chord borrowed from D Locrian (flat [^]2 and flat [^]5) and it foreshadows the chromatic passage that will begin in m. 11.
- D-flat Lydian mm. 11-14? (We tossed this idea around quite a lot!)
- The prominent D-flats beginning in m. 11 provide the C-sharp in an enharmonically reimagined context.
- The voice often has triplet figures over a duple piano → demonstration of the singer's conflict.