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 ^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.