Lesson 2
AFRICAN AMERICAN SPIRITUALS

By Jessica Shapiro & Mr. Regan and Mr. Clement
History of Spirituals

- "A spiritual is a type of religious folksong that is most closely associated with the enslavement of African people in the American South." ("African American Spirituals," LOC)
- Dating back to late 1700s as a result of Christianization of African slaves.
- Uses biblical references such as the stories of Moses, Daniel, and Ezekiel as a comparison to singers’ own lives
- Express hope and despair
- Usually sung in call-and-response form
- After Civil War, African American churches established choirs to sing spirituals which became very popular
Deep River

Anonymous song with unknown date

- First published in 1875 in J.B.T. Marsh’s *The Story of the Jubilee Singers: With Their Songs*

- Popularized/Standardized by African American composer Henry T. Burleigh
Deep River

Å What story do you think the lyrics of this spiritual are trying to convey?

Å Where is the River Jordan and what is its significance in the song?
   ï The reference to the River Jordan is a metaphor. What do you think it is a metaphor for?

Å What is on the other side of the River Jordan in the song?
   ï Do you think this is another metaphor? If so, what is it a metaphor for?
Here is an example of a historic Spiritual, “Deep River” sung by the Fisk Jubilee Singers, a historically black choir:

ï https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GcS_WxmTPA8

Here is an example of a modern version of the song arranged by Moses Hogan and sung by Brysien Beer:

ï https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UbJEyUaG8Es

What is the same and/or different about these two versions?
Spirituals vs. Opera

Here is an example of the same song sung by Marian Anderson:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bytFrSL4_4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bytFrSL4_4)

What do you notice about Marian Anderson’s style of singing compared to the previous two versions?

Though Marian Anderson is considered an opera singer, how has she used Spirituals to influence her singing?
Citation


Resource Guide

• African American Music Trails of North Carolina:
  http://www.africanamericanmusicnc.com/about-the-music/music-styles/

• Columbia College Chicago Center for Black Music Research:
  http://www.colum.edu/cbmr/Resources/style-genre-definitions.html

• All Music: http://www.allmusic.com/