

Trailblazers in Opera: The Hyers Sisters

LESSON PLANS

MATERIALS

- One pager about The Hyers Sisters
- Edpuzzle.com account
- Access to the 27-minute Voices For Freedom PBS video, the 3-minute interview video, and the Blackface Minstrel video.
- Pencils, Crayons or Colored pencils
- Speakers and Projector/Smartboard

CONTENT VOCABULARY

- Trailblazer
- Minstrel Show
- Reconstruction Era
- The Civil Rights Act of 1866
- Cultural Appropriation
- Exploitation

PRE-LESSON STEPS

1. Create a free account with Edpuzzle.com (This step will give your students access to the video assignments)
2. Please write these essential questions on the board or display in your online meeting space. (Please adapt wording to fit your students' reading level.)
 - a. What is a Minstrel Show and how did they portray the lives of African Americans?
 - b. What is the Reconstruction Era ?
 - c. How are the Hyers Sisters considered activists by just performing music?
3. Write the "bell ringer" up on the board. "What would you do if you saw this type of performance on TV today? How does it make you feel?" Show this video Blackface Minstrel Show and Dance (a performance of an actual minstrel show filmed in the early 1900s).

ACTIVITY STEPS

Day One

1. Introduction: Start class by saying something like this, “In today’s class, we are going to examine a time in history that isn’t very comfortable to share. While you are watching this video, please be respectful to the thoughts and feelings of your classmates by waiting until it’s time for sharing personal reflection before we discuss this. We will only watch a few moments of the video, after which, we will take time to have a free writing session.” Show the video Blackface Minstrel Show and Dance (a performance of a Minstrel show). (This is important. Please help the students by framing the moment so there isn’t any laughter while watching. This can be a very triggering video.)
 - a. Give the students 5 minutes’ “writing time” about the question. Have them journal about it. This can be your “bell ringer” for the day.
 - b. After the five-minute writing time, call the group back together to discuss their feelings about what they saw. Please invite students to write one word on the board (or write for them). Please keep these thoughts for the end. (Allow as much time as needed.)
 - c. Please explain that you will be learning about two Black women, the Hyers Sisters, who stood up to this type of performance practice by innovating their own.
2. Show the interview about the The Hyers Sisters (3:05)
 - a. After watching the video have the student read a brief history of the Hyers Sisters’ life (article found from The St. Louis American March 2020)
 - b. After reading, have the students fill in a worksheet about the Hyers Sisters’ historical accomplishments. (page 3)
3. Homework before the next day of class: Have your students watch videos about the reconstruction era and blackface. (use Edpuzzle to answer questions about the video while watching)
 - a. Blackface: A cultural history of a racist art form
 - b. Reconstruction era

HISTORICAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS WORKSHEET

After reading the St. Louis American article about the life of The Hyers Sisters, please answer the following questions providing evidence from the article to support your response.

1. Who were The Hyers Sisters and what were they famous for?
2. Why did the filmmaker Susheel Bibbs decide to create her documentary?
3. How does the article describe The Hyers Sisters' style of performance?
4. If you were interviewing the Hyers Sisters about their career, what questions would you ask them that are not already answered in the article?

ACTIVITY STEPS CONT'D

Day Two: Video about the Hyers Sisters

1. Discussion: Start class with a journal reflection on the homework from the night before.
 - a. What did they find most curious about the video regarding the Reconstruction Era?
 - b. Can they think of examples of cultural appropriation and exploitation in today's popular culture that are similar to depictions of blackface in the early 20th century?
2. Ask your students to discuss their thoughts and feelings on the journal topic in small groups and then share discussion points with the room.
3. Share the video: [ViewFinder](#) | [Voices For Freedom](#) | [Season 23](#) | [Episode 12](#) (27:18)
4. After watching the video, allow students to share what they have learned through a worksheet after the video.
 - a. Or use the questions to start a conversation with the class about the events of the Hyers Sisters' lives.

STANDARDS

Missouri Fine Arts GLEs

National Standards

MU: Re7B.8b (pg. 11)

FA 3, 5

Identify and compare the context of programs of music from a variety of genres, cultures, and historical periods.

MU: Cn10A.8a (pg. 14)

FA 1, 4, 5

Demonstrate how interests, knowledge, and skills relate to personal choices and intent when creating, performing, and responding to music.

MU: Cn11A.8a (pg. 15)

FA 1, 3, 4, 5

Demonstrate understanding of relationships between music and the other arts, other disciplines, varied contexts, and daily life.

Missouri Social Studies GLEs

9-12.AH.1.CC.D

Using an inquiry lens, develop compelling questions about United States history post 1870 to determine helpful resources and consider multiple points of view.

9-12.AH.2.Gov.A

Analyze laws, policies and processes to determine how governmental systems affect individuals and groups in society in United States History C. 1870 to 2010.

6-8. AH.5.PGC.1.A

Using an American history lens, describe how peoples' perspectives shaped the sources/artifacts they created.

6-8. AH.5.PGC.1.B

Using an American history lens, examine the origins and impact of social structures and stratifications on societies and relationships between peoples.

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