

# Trailblazers in Opera: Robert McFerrin, Sr.

## LESSON PLANS

### MATERIALS

- Biography by the Central Arkansas Library System Encyclopedia
- Biography #2 <http://afrovoices.com/robert-mcferrin-biography/>
- WNYC Radio Interview <https://www.wnyc.org/series/classical-music-and-the-afro-american>
- Video: Robert McFerrin, Sr. sings spirituals
- Dry-erase board and markers
- Paper and writing utensils

### CONTENT VOCABULARY

- Trailblazer
- Baritone
- Congenial
- Siffleur
- Transcend
- Truncated

### PRE-LESSON STEPS

1. Please write these Essential Questions on the board or display them in your online meeting space.
  - a. What does it mean to be a trailblazer?
  - b. How did racial politics impact the careers of artists in the 20th century?
2. Write the following “bell ringer” up on the board: “What does it mean to be a trailblazer?”

## ACTIVITY STEPS

### I. What is a “trailblazer”?

1. As students enter, play the YouTube video [Robert McFerrin, Sr. sings spirituals](#)
  - a. Invite a few students to share their impressions of the audio, record their impressions and save them for the end of the lesson.
2. Using the Think-Pair-Share method ask students to brainstorm synonyms and/or characteristics of someone considered a “trailblazer”. (For younger students you may want to break up the word and define trailblazer prior to Think-Pair-Share) Be prepared with prompts such as pioneer, first-ever, achiever, courageous, determined, etc. Have a student from each pair share their answers and record them. Ask students to select 3-5 characteristics that are necessary for someone to be considered a “trailblazer.”
3. Ask students to name people they believe are trailblazers and why (using the characteristics they identified).

### II. Who is Robert McFerrin, Sr.?

1. Explain that we will learn about a singer by the name of Robert McFerrin, Sr., to determine if he would be considered a trailblazer and why his career made such an impact.
2. Provide the either or both biographies and the WNYC radio interview for students and ask them to identify information from these sources that would indicate McFerrin is a trailblazer and record them under your selected “characteristics.”
  - a. For further discussion ask students:
    - i. What were key events in his life that led him to become a trailblazer in music?
    - ii. What challenges and obstacles did Robert McFerrin, Sr. face as a vocal artist?
    - iii. Why was McFerrin’s appearance on stage at the Metropolitan Opera important?
    - iv. How did racial politics impact the careers of artists in the 20th century?
3. Play the spiritual from the beginning of class and ask students to comment on the selection again. Compare their responses from the beginning of class. Ask students what changed about their impressions and why.

## ACTIVITY STEPS CONT'D

### III. Reflection

1. Have students select one of the three prompts as a reflective response:
  - a. Why is it important to learn about trailblazers?
  - b. What are ways you could share Robert McFerrin, Sr.'s story as a trailblazer?
  - c. How would Robert McFerrin, Sr.'s career be different today?
  - d. Using the vocabulary words draw or select images that represent each word.
  - e. Create a poster promoting Robert McFerrin, Sr. as a trailblazer.

# 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 people's 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.

**Lesson plan developed by:**

**Cicely A. Perry, BA Music Education, Choir Director and Piano Instructor, Westinghouse College Prep, Chicago, IL**