

LESSON PLAN

Women of Color in the Conducting Profession: Where Are They?

By Ronnie Wooten

Connections to High School (can be made age-appropriate for middle school)

Many African American students (and others) are often involved in musical activities, often from an early age. Most of these students are exposed first to music that they might hear in their homes, or on media devices such as iPhones, iPads, computers, tablets, and several others. Today there are also several media platforms available for listening and sharing music of virtually every style and from every cultural tradition, including YouTube, Facebook, Spotify, iTunes, and others. In other words, music of all types is much more available now than at any previous time in history. Students in both public and private schools often choose music as an elective subject, usually starting in middle school (grades 6-8). Generally, they choose either instrumental music (band, orchestra, jazz band, marching band) or vocal music (choir, madrigal group, show choir, musicals), and as they move into and through these programs into high school, many make the decision to pursue music more formally, often leading them to pursue music as a college major.

MATERIALS

Computer/Projector (for showing video clips)

Whiteboard with markers

Locate 3 short video clips/photographs of White male orchestral conductors

Locate 3 short video clips/photographs of Black male orchestral conductors

Locate 3 short video clips/photographs of White female orchestral conductors

Locate 3 short video clips/photographs of Black female orchestral conductors

GOALS

Students will gain knowledge about one of the most exclusive professions in Western classical music—conducting—and the nature of the history (brief) and opportunities for Black women within that profession.

OBJECTIVES

- To learn some of the various names for an orchestral conductor/musician and other terms: maestro, conductor, music director, leader, artistic director, orchestra, classical music, virtuoso, prodigy, Juilliard, conservatory.
- To understand and help clarify terminology that relates to issues/discussions of personal identity: race, ethnicity, gender, minority, double minority.
- To give students preliminary information about what a conductor is and the function of that person in relation to the orchestra.
- To possibly encourage young Black students (and other students of color) to consider conducting as a profession (particularly those who already have musical expertise).
- To help Black students understand that people of color have achieved and continue to achieve in areas of music outside of the popular and gospel genres.
- To help students of color understand, acknowledge, and appreciate the accomplishments of Black women in the world of classical music in general.

Activity 1

Guided Discussion

Play/show each set of videos or photographs in the following order: White males, Black males, White females, Black Females. Teacher should ask about general characteristics of the people in the video without mentioning race or gender. *Try to see if the students notice race or gender first!!!*

Initiate discussion about the types of people who are playing in the orchestra and the person leading it. Try to locate examples that are generally very *clear and obvious* and ask the following questions:

- 1) Can you identify any females in the group?
- 2) Can you identify any people of color in the group?
- 3) For questions 1 & 2 above, what instruments are these persons playing?
- 4) What group (gender/ethnicity) is most prevalent in the orchestra?
- 5) Who is leading the group?
- 6) Can you identify the race/ethnicity/gender of the person leading the group?
- 7) What group seems to be left out as far as the leaders are concerned?

Hopefully it will be obvious that NO women are represented as leaders.

- a. Discuss why women might be underrepresented.
- b. What other professions/areas tend to have fewer/no women?
- c. Why are women underrepresented? Is this changing? Should it change? Why/Why not?

Teacher: Today's lesson will focus specifically on Black women and the challenges that they face in the very exclusive conducting profession, while at the same time acknowledging that White women are also underrepresented in the conducting profession.

Activity 2

Have students read the article by Ronnie Wooten: "Women of Color in the Conducting Profession: Where Are They?"

Instruct the students to respond to the following prompts:

- Title of Article:
- Author:
- Magazine or Journal:
- Date of Publication:
- Your Name:
- Main point of article:
- Subpoints in article:
- Applications of above points to class discussion:
- Relevance of this information to you as a critical thinker:

Activity 3

Follow-Up Discussion

- Ask students for other examples of Black women in leadership in *musical organizations (not necessarily classical)*.

Ex. Sheila E, Eva Jessye, Clara Ward, Paula Abdul

- Ask students about Black women (past/present) who are in leadership positions in *non-musical organizations/professions*.

Ex. Oprah Winfrey, Madame C.J. Walker, Shirley Chisholm, Shonda Rhimes

- Search for other Black females who have achieved notoriety in classical music as performers, NOT conductors.

Ex. Leontyne Price, Kathleen Battle, Deniece Graves (opera)

Florence Price, Zenobia Perry, Margaret Bonds (composers)

Natalie Hinderas, Frances Walker (concert pianists)

National Standards for Social Studies**

History

Teacher Expectations

- Enable learners to develop historical comprehension in order that they might reconstruct the literal meaning of a historical passage, identify the central question(s) addressed in historical narrative, draw upon data in historical maps, charts, and other graphic organizers; and draw upon visual, literary, or musical sources;
- Help learners to identify issues and problems in the past, recognize factors contributing to such problems, identify and analyze alternative courses of action, formulate a position or course of action, and evaluate the implementation of that decision;

Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Teacher Expectations

- Help learners understand the concepts of role, status, and social class and use them in describing the connections and interactions of individuals, groups, and institutions in society;
- Help learners analyze group and institutional influences on people, events, and elements of culture in both historical and contemporary settings;
- Explain to learners the various forms institutions take, and explain how they develop and change over time;

Culture and Cultural Diversity

Teacher Expectations

- Encourage learners to compare and analyze societal patterns for preserving and transmitting culture while adapting to environmental or social change;
- Have learners interpret patterns of behavior reflecting values and attitudes that contribute or pose obstacles to cross-cultural understanding;
- Guide learners as they construct reasoned judgments about specific cultural responses to persistent human issues;

**Adapted from *National Standards for Social Studies Teachers*. Developed by the NCSS National Task Force for Social Studies Standards, NCSS, 56 pp., 2002.

Assessment

1. Students will demonstrate their understanding of the fact that Black women (and men) have achieved recognition in classical music by locating others (not mentioned here) in pictures, short video clips, and biographies. These will be shared with other students in class.
2. Students will create a scrapbook, portfolio, collage, or video collage that shows the accomplishment of Black women in classical music.
3. Students will locate five university/college websites to see what, if any offerings they might have in Black music history. Find out if the courses are required for graduation/elective, who teaches the courses, and if there is a syllabus for each course available. At least three of the schools should be Historically Black Colleges and Universities.
4. Locate a Black conductor of any group or gender (preferably women) and interview him/her regarding personal training, areas of expertise, current work situation, and challenges in the workplace and in the profession at large.
5. Using the Article Summary Form that students completed during Activity 2, students will write a two- to three-page narrative paper using that information; more specific writing rules will be shared in class.

Teacher Resources

- Ani, Marimba (Dona Richards). *Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior*. Trenton: African World Press, 1994.
- Banfield, William C. *Musical Landscapes in Color: Conversations with Black American Composers*. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2003.
- Campbell, Patricia Sheehan. *Lessons from the World: A Cross-Cultural Guide to Music Teaching and Learning*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1991.
- Crawford, Richard. *America's Musical Life: A History*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2001.
- DeLorenzo, Lisa C, ed. *Giving Voice to Democracy in Music Education: Diversity and Social Justice*. New York: Routledge (Taylor and Francis Group), 2016.
- Elliott, David J. *Music Matters: A New Philosophy of Music Education*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

- Feagin, Joe, Vera Hernan, and Pinar Batur. *White Racism: The Basics*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Feagin, Joe. *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations*. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Feagin, Joe R., and Clairece B. *Racial and Ethnic Relations*. 5th ed. Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1996.
- Sheperd, John. *Music as Social Text*. Oxford: Polity Press, 1991.
- Southern, Eileen. *The Music of Black Americans: A History*. 3rd ed. New York: W. W. Norton, 1997.
- Volk, Theresa. *Music, Education and Multiculturalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

(Endnotes)

1. D. Antoinette Handy, *Black Conductors* (London: Scarecrow Press, 1995), 17.
2. Heidi Waleson, "Music Maestra, Please," *New York Times*, April 16, 1989, Section 2, 1.
3. *Ibid.*, Section 2, 36.
4. Hannah Levintova, "Here's Why You Seldom See Women Leading a Symphony," *Mother Jones Magazine*, September 23, 2013.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. Elliot Galkin, *A History of Orchestral Conducting In Theory and Practice* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1988), xxxvi.
8. Daniel T. Politoske, *Music* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1992), 145.
9. Handy, *Black Conductors*, 509.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, 320.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*, 212–20.
14. *Ibid.*, 219.
15. *Ibid.*, 218–19.
16. Earl Calloway, "Black Conductors Making Progress," *Chicago Daily Defender* (Chicago, IL), January 8-14, 1972, 36. Note: There were eight other conductors (all Black males) featured in this article.
17. Handy, *Black Conductors*, 347.
18. Clyde Owen Jackson, "Two Black Women of Courage: This Day and Age," *The Informer*, January 31, 1987, 3.
19. Cunningham, "Combined Orchestra Pays Tribute to Prominent Composer Dawson," *Houston Post* (Houston, TX), July 2, 1989, A32.
20. Handy, *Black Conductors*, 390–404.
21. Susan Bulba, "Symphony Makes Strong Start," *Daily Times* (Gloucester, NH), October 29, 1986, 5.
22. Alan Bostick, "Breaking the Sound Barrier: The Woman Behind the Baton," *Tennessean* (Nashville, TN), July 7, 1991, 2J.
23. Handy, *Black Conductors*, 353–57.
24. *Ibid.*, 356.
25. *Ibid.*, 357.