An African-American Legacy: The Harlem Renaissance

The Harlem Motive

Skills/Learning Goals: Learning the purpose of a musical motive
Building on a musical idea to tell your story

Big Ideas: By merging the techniques found in orchestral music and jazz, we are able to reflect stories and creative ideas that are distinct to this American culture.

What to Review: Review the history of Harlem, New York and what made it the perfect location for vibrancy during the Renaissance of the 20s and 30s. Explore your own community and discover what makes it creatively unique.

Using this Video: Follow along with the Harlem motive. You will have two pauses – one to add your musical take on the original motive, and the other to develop your own motive based on where you live.

Pause 1: Teaching Artist Laura Weiner and Guest Artist Charenee Wade sing and improvise over the Harlem motive created by Duke Ellington. How might you embellish this motive using the techniques you learned?

Pause 2: It’s always fun to explore where you’re from. Using the examples from Brooklyn and Cheyenne Mountain, what sounds, or styles might you use to represent your own neighborhood?

Extension: Identify other ways in which a community can be represented using other forms of arts. What are those characteristics? And, who are the artists that have popularized this tradition? Remember, Duke Ellington was not from Harlem, but was so drawn to the community and culture that he could write iconic works to reflect that experience.