An African-American Legacy: The Harlem Renaissance

Singing the Blues

Skills/Learning Goals:
- Understanding the structure of the blues.
- Exploring the historical and cultural importance of the blues scale and its power to communicate feelings and stories.

Big Ideas:
Nearly 300 years after the first enslaved Africans were brought to the United States, a musical tradition emerged to tell stories of oppression, hope, and freedom.

Preparing for the Video:
Review the history of the blues and its influence on popular music. Identify some famous blues artists and discuss what important stories they had to tell.

How to Use this Video:
Listen to the style of the singer and the groove of the piano. You will have two moments to pause and practice on your own.

Pause 1:
Teaching Artists Robert Fleitz and guest artist Charenee Wade are discussing and demonstrating the structure of the blues scale. What feelings or stories come to mind, especially in the moments of tension and release?

Pause 2:
Syncopation is a musical technique that propels the rhythmic drive in the blues. What do you notice when you hear the rhythm between the downbeats? And, how does that help tell the story in Still’s Lenox Avenue?

Extension:
Another important musical tool used in the blues is called improvisation, like when a singer ad-libs, or when a dancer freestyles. Using the blues scale from the video, how could you tell your own story?