

Northwestern University

Bienen School of Music

*Aaron Copland's Old American Songs:*

*Simple Gifts, At the River, Zion's Walls*

Master of Music Education

Theory Domain Project

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## Introduction

Aaron Copland is credited as an instrumental force in the creation of a distinctly American style of composition. In his later years, he was referred to as the “Dean of American Composers” (Pollack, 1999, p. 186). Copland composed over 100 works in his lifetime. Among his often performed work is the *Old American Songs*, two sets of American folk tunes, originally set for voice and piano, written halfway through his career. These songs are a compositional treasure and are often used as a teaching tool for the study of American music as well as Copland’s unique compositional tools.

In middle school, I have found that my students often take an immediate liking to Copland’s music. It reminds them of songs they heard when they were young or perhaps songs they sing at church without being too juvenile and “below” their emotional level. They often associate his music with an “American” sound. They regularly comment that Copland’s *Appalachian Spring* reminds them of cowboys and the wild west. This domain project will focus on three of the *Old American Songs* in arrangements appropriate for a middle school choral classroom. The three songs detailed will be “At the River,” “Simple Gifts” and “Zion’s Walls.” All three of these songs have the common thread of being religious in text and in history, though each is from a different theological and compositional background. All three pieces use “Copland-isms” like parallel fifths and octaves, open chord writing and quintal harmonies, but each has their own distinct character. These pieces are excellent choices for the middle school age group because the theoretical principles and part writing are accessible to students of this age and they provide an avenue for discussion about American “folk” music.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

### **Old American Songs**

The *Old American Songs* is two sets of five folk songs. The first set of songs includes *The Boatman's Dance*, *The Dodger*, *Long Time Ago*, *Simple Gifts*, and *I Bought Me a Cat*. The second set of songs includes *The Little Horses*, *Zion's Walls*, *The Golden Willow Tree*, *At the River* and *Ching-A-Ring Chaw*. Copland wrote the first song set in the late 1940's at the request of Benjamin Britten. Britten asked Copland to write a set of American songs he could use at the Aldeburg Festival in England. Copland obliged, selecting the songs from varying sources including The Harris Collection of American Poetry, children's tunes, folk song collections, recordings from the Library of Congress and hymnals from various religious traditions. In 1950, Britten premiered the work for piano and baritone with Peter Pears at the Festival. The song set was a soaring success and in 1952, Copland published a second set of five pieces. This time, baritone William Warfield premiered the pieces in 1953. In 1955, Copland went on to set the entire set for voice and orchestra (Pollack, 1999). The three pieces to be examined all come from distinctive religious traditions, but the way Copland chooses to set them is "optimistic and cheerful, yet avoid theological specificity or exclusivity" (Smolko, 2009, p.49). Both song sets have been arranged into various voicings since their original premiere, but all retain Copland's original compositional spirit (Brooks, 2002).

### **At the River**

"At the River" was originally a Christian hymn written by Baptist Minister Robert Lowry. Lowry was an East Coast Baptist Minister and hymn writer in mid 1800's. He is credited with over 500 hymn tunes, among them "How Can I Keep from Singing" and

“Nothing But the Blood.” Despite Lowry’s success as a hymn writer, it was his pastoral calling that was more important to him, having stated, "Music, with me has been a side issue... I would rather preach a gospel sermon to an appreciative audience than write a hymn. I have always looked upon myself as a preacher and felt a sort of depreciation when I began to be known more as a composer." (Butterworth, 1985, p.165)

Copland took the tune itself from the United Methodist Hymnal, but chose not to set each verse. Instead, he focused on the chorus and first and final verses. The original hymn also had three interior verses that are not set by Copland. The chosen text focuses on redemption and speaks of reaching “the river that flows by the throne of God.” Copland never gives reason for his use of these particular phrases, but the chosen text matches his majestic setting of the piece.

### **Zion’s Walls**

“Zion’s Walls” was also a part of the first set of *Old American Songs*, but there has been decidedly more controversy surrounding this particular selection. “Zion’s Walls” was seen as a testament to Copland’s American and Jewish heritages combined. John McCurry originally published the hymn in *The Social Harp*, but Copland’s initial brush with the hymn came from George Pullen Jackson’s *Down-East Spirituals*. Copland kept many of the changes made by Jackson in his publication of the piece in his setting, particularly the shifts from 6/8 to 9/8 throughout the piece. Copland’s familiarity and setting of the hymn came several years before *Old American Songs*. He initially set the hymn in 1945 for his flopped play “Tragic Ground,” but the failure of the play meant the music was never published. Copland recycled the hymn with some edits several years later while writing *Old American Songs*.

In Copland's version for *Old American Songs*, he also chooses to change a word of text from Jesus to Zion, as seen below.

Come, fathers and mother, Come, sisters and brothers.  
Come, join us in singing the praises of *Zion* (originally Jesus)

This change is critical, as it not only removes the specificity to Christianity, but also that it chooses to heighten the Jewish acknowledgement in the piece. At the time of its creation, Copland himself was acknowledging his own Judaism and was a fervent supporter of the Zionist cause (Smolko, 2009).

ZION'S WALLS. Set piece. JOHN G. McCURRY, 1853. 187

Come, fathers and mothers, Come, sisters and brothers, Come, join us in singing the praises of Jesus; O, fa - ther, don't you feel de-ter-mined,

To meet with - in the walls of Zi - on. We'll shout and go round, We'll shout and go round, We'll shout and go round the walls of Zi - on.

**Figure 1: Zion's Walls - McCurry**

No. 213  
ZION'S WALLS, SOC 137

Pentatonic, mode 3 (I II III — V VI —)

Come, fath-ers and moth-ers, come, sis-ters and broth-ers, Come join us  
in sing-ing the prais-es of Je-sus. O fath-ers,  
don't you feel de-ter-min'd To meet with-in the  
walls of Zi-on? We'll shout and go round, We'll shout and  
go round, We'll shout and go round the walls of Zi-on.

**Figure 2: Zion's Walls - Jackson**

### Simple Gifts

“Simple Gifts” is likely the most recognizable of the tunes Copland chose for his song set. The tune is a Shaker Dance Song written by Elder Joseph Brackett in 1848. The first publication of the tune outside of the Shaker community was in 1940 with Edward Deming Andrews’s publication of the book *The Gift to be Simple: Songs, Dances and Rituals of the American Shakers*. Copland read the book and pulled *Simple Gifts* for use in another famous Copland work, *Appalachian Spring*. The tune gained popularity and a recognizable quality when premiered in 1944. As with “Zion’s Walls,” Copland edited and recycled the piece and then went on to use it in *Old American Songs*.

THE ORIGINAL LYRICS (with sections unused by Copland omitted)

AT THE RIVER

Shall we gather at the river,  
Where bright angel feet have trod,  
With its crystal tide forever  
Flowing by the throne of God?

*Refrain:*

Yes, we'll gather at the river,  
The beautiful, the beautiful river;  
Gather with the saints at the river  
That flows by the throne of God.

Soon we'll reach the silver river,  
Soon our pilgrimage will cease;  
Soon our happy hearts will quiver  
With the melody of peace.

ZION'S WALLS

Come fathers and mothers  
Come sisters and brothers  
Come join us in singing the praises of Zion.  
O fathers, don't you feel determined  
To meet within the walls of Zion?  
We'll shout and go round  
The walls of Zion

SIMPLE GIFTS

Tis the gift to be simple, tis the gift to be free  
Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be

And when we find ourselves in the place just right,  
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight

When true simplicity is gained,  
To bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed,

To turn, turn will be our delight  
Till by turning, turning we come 'round right.

## THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

Choral arrangements have been made for nine of the ten original *Old American Songs*. Copland's colleague, Irving Fine, arranged many though R. Wilding-White, Ken Straker and Glenn Koponen also contributed their own arrangements. All retain Copland's original melody and accompaniment, thereby varying little from the original. Fine arranged *Simple Gifts* in both SA and TB and passes the melody off between the soprano and alto (or tenor and bass parts) effectively weaving the melody in and out throughout the piece. Koponen arranged *Zion's Walls* for SATB as well as for SSAA. The sopranos lead off his arrangement with all parts eventually joining in a unison call before breaking into harmony. Wilding-White arranged *At the River* for SSA, SATB, TTBB and SA. Much of the harmonic material is drawn from the accompaniment written by Copland. In the chorus, Wilding-White introduces a counter-melody in the alto part that pairs well with the melody (in thirds) in the chorus of the piece. For this work, the SA version of *Simple Gifts*, the Unison version of *Zion's Walls* and the SA version of *At the River* will be used.

Salient characteristics of Copland's writing can be seen in each of these pieces. The use of countermelody, ninth chords, quintal harmonies, use of melodic fragments/motives and intervallic relationships modeled after the original hymns will be examined along with form and phrase analysis.



## THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

### Simple Gifts

In *Simple Gifts*, Copland retains much of the original tune, making few additions himself. *Simple Gifts* employs the use of melodic fragments in the opening section, hinting at the familiar melody to come.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the piano accompaniment of 'Simple Gifts'. Both systems are in 2/4 time and marked with a tempo of quarter note = 120. The first system shows the right hand playing a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, while the left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment. The second system continues this pattern, with the right hand playing a more complex melodic line and the left hand providing a steady accompaniment. The notation is in a key with three flats (B-flat major or D-flat minor).

### Zion's Walls

Unlike in *Simple Gifts*, *Zion's Walls* contains several changes. In addition to the word change noted above, Copland also extends the original melody through repetition and the addition of a final phrase that is raised a fifth higher than the original. This addition gives Copland the flexibility to add an interlude in the Mediant key before returning to the home key of F Major. This magnificent foray into A $\flat$  Major allows Copland to put his own stamp on the piece. This interlude could be interpreted as the jubilant dance referred to in the text.



**Figure 3: Zion's Walls Interlude**

*Zion's Walls* also contains a countermelody that becomes a crucial part of the piece, woven seamlessly into both the accompaniment and vocal lines. At the beginning, this countermelody is seen in strong parallel octaves that ring with a church bell quality, while the melody itself runs beneath. This countermelody returns often, both in the accompaniment and, eventually, sung by the singers themselves.

Counter melody

*f* (clear sonority—r. and l. hand with equal intensity)

Melody

[c.m.]

[mel.]

**Figure 3: Zion’s Walls countermelody (Smolko, 54)**

Copland also works hard to maintain the integrity of the shape-note hymnody by emphasizing 4ths, 5ths, 2nds and 7ths (Smolko, 2009).

### At the River

In *At the River*, Copland chooses to set only stanzas one and four of the original hymn. He retains much of the original melody, but makes one crucial change in the verses. He raises the final note of each verse from the tonic to the third, propelling us forward in the refrain and providing a sense of forward motion and lack of resolution throughout the piece. *At the River* also includes a “plodding chordal accompaniment (which) gives the feel of a host of worshippers making their way to the riverbank through the use of a contemporary walking bass line.” (Kennedy, 1999, p. 35) Both the walking bass and choral accompaniment can be seen below.

The image shows a musical score for the piece 'At the River'. It consists of two staves: a single staff for the Voice and a grand staff for the Piano. The Voice staff is in the treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature (C). The piano accompaniment is in a grand staff, with the right hand in the treble clef and the left hand in the bass clef, also in one flat and common time. The score spans five measures. The voice part begins with a melodic line of eighth and quarter notes, followed by a half note and a whole note. The piano accompaniment features chords and single notes in both hands, providing a harmonic and rhythmic foundation for the voice.

**Figure 4: At the River**

*At the River* also does not employ the typical predominant-dominant-tonic progression. Copland instead uses several other tools to shape the piece and create a sense of color and voice leading.

Arrangers have worked to make these pieces suitable for school age choirs, all of who can come to know their American heritage in a deeper way through the performance and study of these pieces. They still hold wide appeal for an older audience as well.

## **SALIENT CHARACTERISTICS AMONG THE PIECES**

### **Chord Structure**

Copland tends to employ the use of fourths, fifths, sevenths and octaves in each piece, retaining the “shape note” quality. He also uses extreme registers for the accompanist (or accompanying instruments) and widely spaced chords, challenging the accompanying instruments to provide a large gamut of sound, particularly in *Zion’s Walls* during the third verse, adding to the jubilant nature of the piece. He does the same in *Simple Gifts* during the second section, spanning over four octaves in the space of 2 beats. Copland also utilizes several tension and release figures throughout all pieces, but most clearly in

*At the River*. Three times he pits an accented leading tone in the bass against the tonic, driving the listener forward through the piece. Finally, he uses parallel octaves, fifths and thirds throughout all three pieces, again providing for an open, widely spaced sound.

### **Form and Phrase Analysis**

“At the River” is in Strophic form. The entire piece is in F Major; through the first several bars are ambiguous. They can be analyzed in f minor with F Major clearly being heard when the vocal parts begin in measure three. In regard to cadences, the piece shows deceptive and half cadences (often going to iii or vi) throughout. However, to the listener, these cadences seem to drive the piece forward and provide continuity, rather than slicing the piece up into separate sections. The piece ends with a Perfect Authentic Cadence, though Copland does not write the cadence in traditional form, adding a 6<sup>th</sup> to the V chord in the penultimate bar.

*Simple Gifts* is written with clear overarching eight bar phrases, broken down into four bar phrases by the arranger with inserted breath marks in the beginning and final sections. The second section does not show those same breath marks and is driven through as an eight bar phrase due to the part writing in the lower voice and accompaniment.

The sections of *Zion's Walls* are most clearly observed through the dynamic phrasing that Copland utilizes to build the jubilation and triumph that eventually break through the piece. This technique is more effective than breaking down each individual section into set phrases, as the piece does not follow typical phrase progression.

### **Use of Ninth Chords**

Copland employs the use of ninth chords throughout “At the River”. The ninth chords serve to add additional harmonic interest underneath the simple hymn melody. The ninth chords are written in several different ways. Some of the ninth chords serve as clear ninth chords, often with the fifth or third removed. Copland also utilizes add-9 chords where he adds the ninth to the triad, often in the bass line or the vocal parts. In other cases, Copland establishes the chord and then uses the ninth to pass into the next chord through the rhythmic motives. These chords do not appear with the same frequency in the other pieces.

### **Quintal Harmonies**

Copland uses several episodes of quintal harmonies during “At the River” as well, most often built on “fa” (Bb). The quintal harmonies support the harmonic language by adding to the consonance/dissonance struggle. The open fifths are present, but these harmonies also produce seconds that cause the listener to hear the dissonant character of these chords. Copland uses these chords in cadential figures throughout the piece, moving into the iii, I or vi chord from the quintal harmony.

### **Rhythmic and Melodic Motives**

Copland enjoys playing with rhythmic and melodic motives in each of these pieces. Rather than inserting rhythmic and melodic motives into the hymn tune, Copland chooses to expand on the motives already present in the original melody. The *Simple Gifts* motive was shown above as a foreshadowing at the very beginning of the piece. In

*Zion's Walls*, the motives of both the melody and countermelody are seen from the very beginning and guide the listener through the piece. The rhythm of *At the River* is built on the dotted eighth-sixteenth note motive. This motive can be found in all but one stanza of the piece, creating a memorable rhythm that the listener comes to expect. In these patterns, the sixteenth note is used as the neighbor tone (often the ninth of the chord) and keeps the line constant around a central pitch. These rhythms come in sets of two, three or four and are always followed by a set of legato pitches, often in the form of half notes. This contrast of short and long rhythms is what makes the tune of this piece so memorable. As the piece builds, the presence of this motive also builds. By the end of the piece, both treble lines and the accompaniment are playing versions of the theme at the same time.

### **Lesson Plan**

#### **Applications to Teaching**

I teach Middle School general music and chorus and could easily use this piece in either setting. This piece opens up a discussion about chords and harmonies my students will be unfamiliar with – ninth chords and quintal harmonies. Often, the singers serve as the ninth of the chord, so it will add an additional level of concentration needed for tuning. Additionally, the contrasting rhythms will give the students the opportunity to explore how these rhythms can be sung differently in order to maximize the effect of the piece. This piece has a majestic quality that will give the students the opportunity to explore the emotional characteristic of the piece. Finally, this is an excellent piece to use to aid in the teaching of American Music. Copland is often seen as one of the

quintessential American composers and this song set would provide many opportunities for students to explore the American musical heritage.

One of the best things about these pieces is their accessibility to students of a variety of age levels. My students will have the background knowledge to understand and follow the melody and will be able to see the open, wide positioning of the chordal structure. They will also be able to find the rhythmic motives and follow them throughout the piece. Their understanding of intervals, albeit basic understanding, will allow me to touch on the quintal harmonies and ninth chords and relate them to the sound quality that is heard. I will also be able to draw my students' attention to some of the "majestic" qualities of each of these pieces, even if the understanding of how that quality is created is above their level of understanding. Students will also be able to understand Copland's use of countermelody and how he fits the two melodies together. If not theoretically, they will be able to sense the difference.

The historical background of these pieces also opens a conversation in American Folk music and typical characteristics of folk music. They will be able to draw on other songs that they may have grown up singing and can easily discuss venues in which this aural tradition might be passed down from generation to generation.

Overall the "take aways" that I expect my students to glean from this piece lie far more in the historical applications Copland uses in these pieces to bring light to American Folk Music and, therefore, what the implications of his writing this song set are on the overall world of music history.



## LESSON PLAN

This will be a multi-part listening and performing unit. Students from each grade of choral ensemble (6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>) will perform one of the three works addressed in the unit. The 6<sup>th</sup> grade choir will rehearse and perform the Unison arrangement by Koponen of *Zion's Walls*. The 7<sup>th</sup> Grade choir will rehearse and perform the SA arrangement by Irving Fine of *Simple Gifts*. The 8<sup>th</sup> Grade choir will rehearse and perform the SA arrangement by Wilding-White of *At the River*. Each ensemble will also partake in a listening curriculum designed around their own piece as well as the two pieces being performed by the other ensembles. Following the performance, they will have the opportunity to reflect on what they felt as they performed as well as what they heard.

**Context:** This will take place in the choral curriculum of a 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade middle school curriculum. While my school currently serves all students through one mass choir of 90 and several break-off groups, this lesson will ideally take place in a situation with three separate grade-level ensembles. Each ensemble meets once daily.

### **Objectives:**

- Students will gain understanding in the work of Aaron Copland.
- Students will effectively perform three selections from Copland's *Old American Songs*.
- Students will demonstrate understanding of American Folk Music and the traditions from which each of these pieces came through discussion and writing.
- Students will further develop their understanding of musical history.

-Students will compare/contrast each of the three pieces being performed by different ensembles.

**National & State Standards Addressed:**

**National:**

1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
5. Reading and notating music.
6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.
7. Evaluating music and music performances.
8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.
9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

**State:**

- **Goal 25 – Language of the Arts**
  - *Learning Standard 25A* – Students who meet the standard understand the sensory elements, organizational principles, and expressive qualities of the arts.
  - *Learning Standard 25b* – Students who meet the standard understand the similarities, distinctions, and connections in and among the arts.
- **Goal 26 – Creating and Performing**
  - *Learning Standard 26A* – Students who meet the standard understand processes, traditional tools, and modern technologies used in the arts.
  - *Learning Standard 26b* – Students who meet the standard can apply skills and knowledge necessary to create and perform in one or more of the arts.
- **Goal 27 – Arts and Civilization**
  - *Learning Standard 27a* – Students who meet the standard can analyze how the arts function in history, society, and everyday life.
  - *Learning Standard 27b* – Students who meet the standard understand how the arts shape and reflect history, society, and everyday life.

Listed below are flexible lesson plans that are broken into sections. Rather than determine the exact number of days to be spent on each section, the plans allow for give and take, depending on the interest and level of students.

**SECTION 1: Defining American Folk Music**

**Opening Questions:** What do you know about folk music? How is folk music passed down from generation to generation? What are the characteristics of folk music? Why is folk music important to a nation?

**Sequencing:**

1. Students will do a free write to list any words, songs or attributes that they connect with the term “folk music.” Due to the structure of the music curriculum in earlier grades, common answers may include children’s songs, patriotic songs and/or the breakdown of the word folk (volk: of the people).
2. Students will then be drawn toward a discussion of the canons and simple songs we begin rehearsal with each day (i.e. Yonder Come Day, Lift Your Voices, Siyahumba, O Music). Do these qualify as folk music? Are they examples of American folk music or do they belong to another country?
3. At this point, we will also introduce the term “rote singing.” The concept will be familiar to the students, but the term will be new vocabulary. Discussion will ensue regarding why this music was passed down and why it was important for it to be learned by “rote” which will bring us to a discussion of the characteristics of the pieces (memorable, easily singable, song “stickiness”).
4. As a wrapping up point, we will discuss other things that help shape our national identity and who we are, as well as why music and art fold into our culture and

<p>help create our national identity.</p>
<p><b>Reflection:</b> <i>Are students able to understand the meaning of the word “folk”? Can they effectively describe the characteristics of folk music and why having American music is important to our National Identity?</i></p>
<p><b>Section 2:</b> Who was Aaron Copland?</p>
<p><b>Opening Questions:</b> Whom do you think of when you name American composers? Who was Aaron Copland?</p>
<p><b>Sequencing:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students will again begin with a free association as they name any American composers that can come up with. Note: This will likely be more successful in 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> than in 6<sup>th</sup> due to student exposure to music history. Likely answers include Copland, Bernstein and Gershwin.</li> <li>2. Students will be given the opportunity to review information on Copland on teacher’s website. Students will read through and bring back 3 “takeaways” to share with the class.</li> <li>3. Students will share and teacher will supplement any “missing” information.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Reflection:</b> <i>If students don’t name Copland, why not? Is there a gap in the curriculum? What are students naming as being interesting – where is their attention immediately drawn? Is there something they want to discuss that is not currently part of the plan? If so, can it be fit in?</i></p>
<p><b>SECTION 3:</b> The Old American Songs</p>
<p><b>Opening Questions:</b> Do you recognize the music you are hearing? Where do you recognize it from? What were the Old American Songs? Why were they written? What</p>

is our American identity?

**Sequencing:**

1. Students will enter the room to hear “Simple Gifts” playing.
2. Students will describe the piece and what they hear.
3. Students will then be shown images of Shaker dwellings and be tasked with comparing the photographs with the music they are hearing. The Barrett, McCoy, Veblen Facets Model (1997) will be used to help guide students through this process.
4. Students will then begin discussing the history of the Old American Songs and why Aaron Copland chose to write them. We will discuss American identity (versus music that represents us as individuals) and why Copland chose these songs in particular to represent American Folk Music. We will discuss their origins and how they represent the place from which they came, much as *Simple Gifts* and the Shaker dwellings have strong connections.

**Reflection:** *What are the students connecting this piece to? Do they understand the role that music plays in identity, both of a person and of a country?*

**SECTION 4** Delving Deeper

**Opening Questions:** How does Copland maintain the integrity of these pieces in his arrangements and how does he make them his own?

**Sequencing:**

1. Students will open with listening to each song that is being performed: Zion’s Walls, Simple Gifts (just a brief review, since they were already exposed) and At the River.

2. Students will complete a random write or draw about the music makes them feel. Students will answer the question “What was the PURPOSE of these songs before Copland set them as choral pieces?”
3. The class will be divided into three sections (or – if too many students – six sections with two groups assigned each piece). Each group will read up on the history of their individual songs, which will be provided in a student-friendly format. Students will then show what they learned by “teaching” the rest of the class about their piece. If it comes up, there can be a brief discussion about religion at this point (i.e. why discussing things that came from someone’s religion and using them in a cultural context is different from telling someone to believe something from religion.)

**Reflection:** *What did the students point out as being the most important elements? What were their takeaways from the history sheet – the main ideas?*

**SECTION 5 – Rehearsing the music**

Opening Questions: Given what you now know, how will this help inform you as we learn and prepare this piece?

**Sequencing: (this will vary depending on the skill level of the group, how they are responding to the music, how much rehearsal time is allotted, etc. This is an overview of a possible sequence.)**

1. Learn the Melody. What do you notice? Did anything change?

**6<sup>th</sup> Grade – Zion’s Walls**

While much of the analysis for *Zion’s Walls* references the setting for SATB, the 6<sup>th</sup> grade students will focus on melody versus countermelody. Copland uses a

countermelody that is woven throughout the piece in the accompaniment that marries well with the original melody. The challenge for the 6<sup>th</sup> grade students, then, will be to find that countermelody and recognize its presence. How does it make them feel?

### 7<sup>th</sup> Grade – Simple Gifts

The main theoretical focus in this piece (or rather Coplandism) is how he plays with the melody and passes it between the different voices and the accompaniment. Once the melody is well learned and ingrained, students will trace the melody through their music. When does the accompanist have a portion of it? When am I singing it? When is the other part singing it? They will then mark their scores accordingly and the focus for this group will be to bring out the melody in those specific places.

### 8<sup>th</sup> Grade – At the River

One of the most intriguing and memorable parts of *At the River* is the chordal relationships. Copland makes use of quintal harmonies and ninth chords throughout the piece and makes good use of avoiding tonic in order to propel forward motion. While the concept of quintal harmonies and even ninth chords will likely be outside the grasp of most middle school singers, they can certainly sense dissonance versus consonance. They also can determine where a phrase ought to go in order to come to completion. They feel it. By making use of these aural skills, these “non-traditional” harmonies can be pointed out and singers will be able to know if they play the role of consonance or dissonance in several specific locations.

**Reflection:** *What went well? Where did students struggle? Were they able to keep some of the earlier preparatory discussion in their minds as they rehearsed?*

**SECTION 6 – Looking at the other pieces (NOTE: Sections 5 and 6 could be**

**presented simultaneously depending on rehearsal time)**

**Opening Question:** Giving what you have experienced with your own piece, how do you think the other two will differ? In what ways will they be similar?

**Sequencing:**

1. Students will open with listing characteristics of their own piece (Appendix B).
2. Students will then listen to recordings of the other two pieces and fill in the appropriate places on their listening guide (Appendix C). Students will have the opportunity to share their thoughts.

**Reflection:** *Was there a common theme among what students noticed? How has this set them up for listening to the performances live?*

**Section 7 – Performance Reflection**

**Opening Question:** Following the performance, how has your opinion on “American” music changed? Do you believe you represented the composer and his choices successfully? Did Copland maintain the integrity of this folk music?

**Sequencing:**

1. Following their performance, students will complete a reflection on their own performance, the performances of the other two groups (as seen during the concert) and their understanding of the techniques Copland used to successfully compose these American songs. (Appendix D).

**Reflection:** *What did students take away from this particular unit? How did their understanding of theory improve? Can they take what they learned and apply it to other music they may hear?*

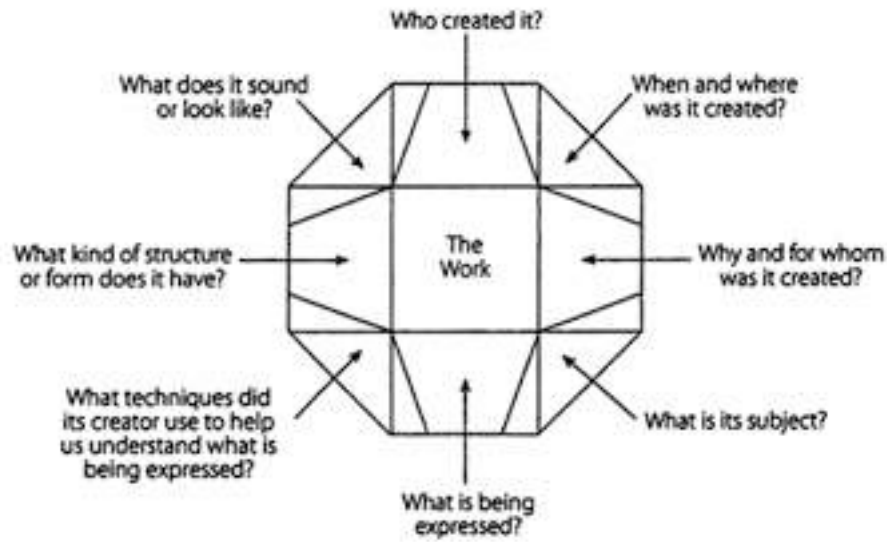


## Resources

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Appendix A

**Facets diagram (Original)** (Barrett, McCoy, Veblen, 1997)



Appendix B (This would be something that could be handed out individually or, more likely in my own class, pasted into their chorus journals)

Considering Your Piece

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Before digging into your piece, name some characteristics you hear upon first listening:

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Listen to the piece again. Can you start to hum along with any of the sections? Is there repetition?

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Now look at the piece as you listen. Can you trace the melody? Look at the intervals between the parts (not applicable for 6<sup>th</sup> grade). In general, are the intervals big or small?

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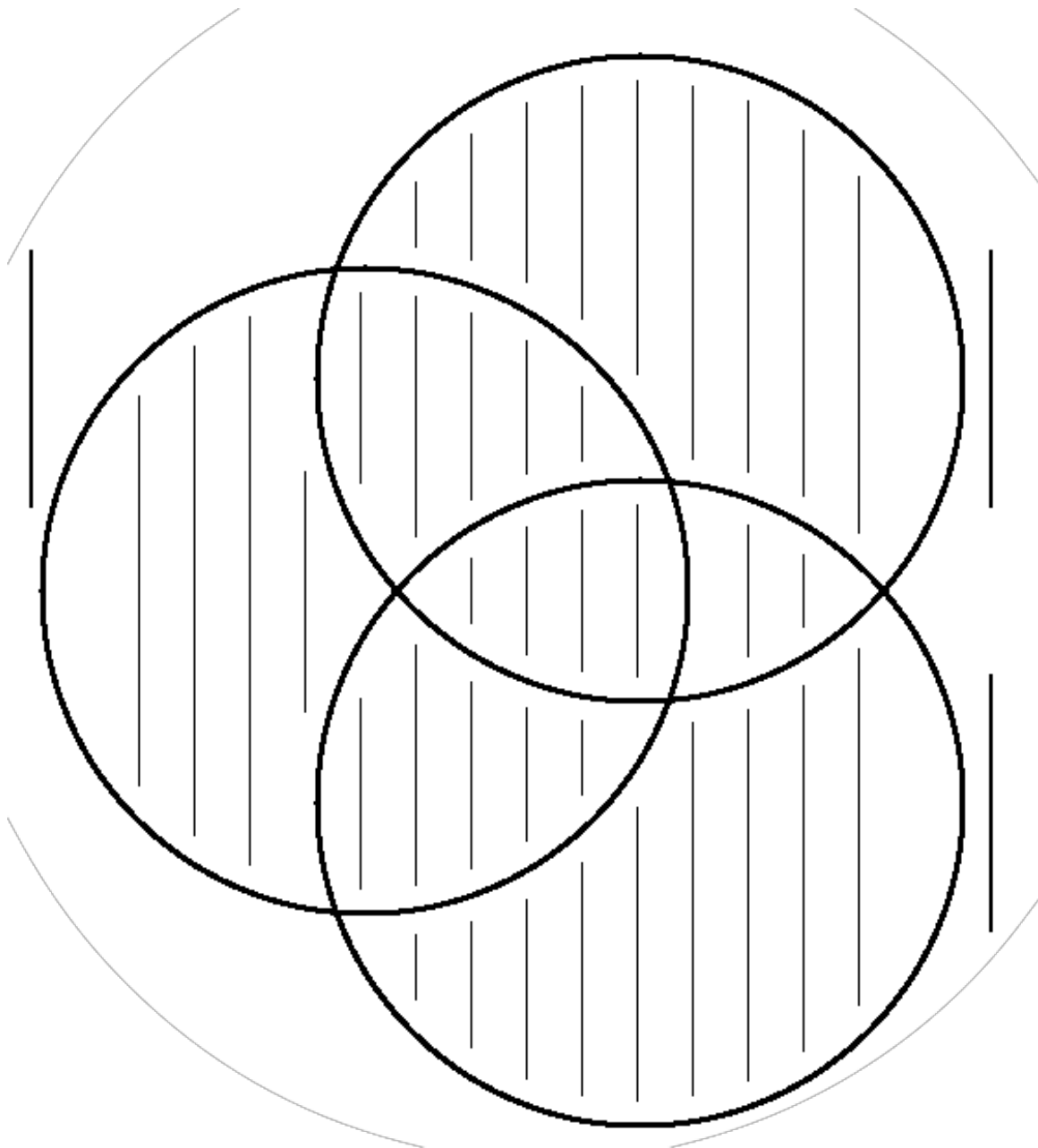
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## Appendix C

### Comparing and Contrasting

Complete the Venn Diagram below using each of the three pieces. Be sure to consider all of the tools we have discussed during this unit.



Appendix D

Post-Concert Reflection

How did you feel about your performance WHILE you were performing? What were you thinking about?

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After watching your performance as well as the performances from the other grade level choruses, what was your reaction?

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How has your opinion or understanding of “American” music changed as this unit comes to a close?

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Do you believe Copland was successful in maintaining the integrity of these folk tunes in his versions?

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