Collaborative Learning in Opera Lesson Plan

Objective

- Students will explore various roles within an opera company and work together in collaborative teams to stage an opera scene.

Essential Questions

- What jobs are essential in bringing an opera to life on the stage?
- How can we build community by working together on an opera scene?

Learning Goals

- Students will explore how working together as a collaborative team is an essential part of creating opera.
- Students will examine a literary scene and will determine how elements of staging, scenery, costumes, props and advertising bring a story and characters to life on the opera stage.

Time Required

- One 90-minute lesson* with optional Musical Extension

Materials Needed

- Student Worksheets

Vocabulary: character, costume, costume designer, director, mood, opera, prop, prop master, publicist, scene, set, set designer, setting

*Notes to Teachers

- In a multidisciplinary art form that combines music, dance, theater and design, opera artists must collaborate to create each component of an opera. It is also an excellent model for collaborative teaching and learning that lends itself to creating a balance between academic and experiential learning.
  - Get tips for setting up collaborative group work using the Teacher Worksheet: Guiding Collaborative Group Work.
- These lessons are specifically designed for middle and/or high school students. However, the content may be adapted for younger students by choosing age-appropriate operas and/or modifying activities to address the skill level and needs of your classroom.
- The times listed for each activity are suggestions only. You may choose to extend this lesson over several days in order to deepen the learning experience of each activity.
Activity 1: Scene Exploration (15 minutes)

- In opera, artists must work together to create each component of the production. The first step in this process is to understand the story, setting, mood and characters and determine as a group how those elements will be portrayed on stage in the opera.
- Divide students into small collaborative groups of four to six.
- Choose scenes from an opera or a piece of literature that you are studying in class and assign a scene to each small group. If you choose to explore opera scenes, here are a few examples to choose from:
  - *Carmen* by Georges Bizet; Act 2, Aria, “Votre toast, je peux vous le render” (Toreador Song)
  - *Rigoletto* by Giuseppe Verdi; Act 3, Quartet, “Bella figlia dell’amore”
  - *La traviata* by Giuseppe Verdi; Act 1, Opening Ensemble Scene, “Dell’invito trascorsa è già l’ora”
  - *Porgy and Bess* by George Gershwin; Act 1, Scene 1, “Summertime”
- In each small group, have students discuss the story, setting, characters, time period and mood, and document their findings on the Group Worksheet: Scene Study.

Activity 2: Jobs in Opera and the Collaborative Process (15 minutes)

- In addition to the character roles in an opera, there are a lot of other roles that people play offstage in making the opera an exciting and engaging experience.
- Using the Student Worksheet: Offstage Opera Roles, have students review a few of the different opera job roles. Then have each student choose a specific role to explore further using the prompting questions and activities.
- Have students share their plans with other group members. Encourage them to ask questions and help each other clarify and refine their decisions.

*Optional Extension

Have students learn more about their jobs by researching online and accessing these resources from opera companies across the country.
Activity 3: Bringing It All Together: Presenting an Opera Scene (30 minutes)

- Have students prepare a presentation for the class in which they will share their decisions for staging the scene on an opera stage.
- To start their presentation to the class, each group will first cast and perform a frozen tableau of the scene they worked on.
- Then the group will present their scene choices in one of the following ways. Each member of the group should be prepared to discuss the specific choices within their job role.
  1. Presentation to the Company Manager — Students will present their plans for the opera scene as if the class were an opera company manager deciding which opera to produce for the season. The group should utilize visuals (posters, PowerPoint, etc.) in order to communicate their design and advertising plans.
  2. Advertising Campaign — Students will present their opera scene as if the class were a ticket-buying audience. The group should utilize visuals and/or audio (posters, radio/TV spot) in order to communicate the important elements from the scene and excite audiences.

Activity 4: Presentation and Reflection (20 minutes)

- Have each group present their scene to the class.
- After each presentation, give the class a chance to ask questions and give notes to the group. Questions might include:
  - What did you notice about their scene?
  - What choices did the group make?
  - How was each job represented in their presentation?
  - What questions do you have for the group?
- Give each group a chance to reflect on their own performance:
  - What did you notice about your own presentation?
  - What were you proud of?
  - What would you like to change and why?
Activity 5: Student Self-Assessment (10 minutes)

- Have each student complete the Student Worksheet: Collaboration Self-Assessment and evaluate his or her contribution to the group collaboration.
- You may also choose to evaluate students’ work using the Teacher Worksheet: Collaboration Rubric.

Musical Extension: Add Music to an Opera Scene

Have each group discuss how music might express the story, mood, emotions and actions of the characters within their opera scene.

- Have students brainstorm a list of songs that represent the same mood and emotions portrayed in their scene. Encourage the students to bring ideas from all genres and styles of music.
- Have each group choose which song will accompany their presentation and be prepared to justify their decision as to why they chose this particular song.

*Optional Composing

Students may also create their own original music to accompany the presentations. Click here for more lessons on composing music with students.
GUIDING COLLABORATIVE GROUP WORK

OPERA IS COLLABORATION

In a multidisciplinary art form that combines music, dance, theater and design, opera artists must collaborate to create each component of an opera. It is also an excellent model for collaborative teaching and learning that lends itself to creating a balance between academic and experiential learning.

Keys to Teaching and Guiding Collaboration:

- Students must feel safe but challenged in a group environment.
- The groups must be small enough (three to five members) so that each student can contribute and feel that his or her ideas are heard and valued.
- Students need time and instruction to learn how to collaborate. Plan to teach these skills in addition to the arts content.
- Establish structure, rules, roles and etiquette for the collaborative process that can help create clarity around outcomes and expectations.
- Teach students to ask questions within the group and offer support to each other in the problem-solving process.
- Music, dance and theater all use the word “ensemble” to refer to a group working together. Students must learn that they need to help each other to meet the ensemble’s goals.
- Members of an ensemble all have responsibility for the group’s success, and every member has something unique to offer and accomplish.

In a collaborative group setting, students should be expected to:

- Be accountable for their own work and contribution to the overall group.
- Share their strengths with the group, but also learn from others and help each other develop weaker skills.
- Engage in activities that improve their understanding of all subjects explored.
- Work together to keep each other motivated.
- Give encouragement to other students as they work together toward a common goal.
### Scene Study

Read and review your literary scene and then answer these questions as a group.

#### THE STORY

What is the action taking place in this scene?

What do you think might have happened before this scene takes place?

What do you think might happen after this scene?

#### THE MOOD and SETTING

Where does the action take place?

What time of day is it?

What is the time period?

What is the mood?

#### THE CHARACTERS

Who are the major characters in this scene?

What are they doing? What are their specific actions?

Are there any conflicts between the characters? If so, what?
# Offstage Opera Roles Student Worksheet

## Offstage Opera Roles

Review each of the opera jobs below. Then choose one role to explore further by answering the prompting questions and completing the activity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Questions for the Role to Consider</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Director** | A director is someone who prepares an opera for production by arranging the details of the stage settings and by instructing the performers in the interpretation of their roles. | **Questions for the Director to Consider:**
  - What is the most important action happening in the scene?
  - What or who is the central focus?
  - What or who is in the background?
  - What questions do you have for the characters? | **Activity:** Based on your answers to the questions above, make suggestions to your group on how you would stage and direct your scene for an opera staging. |
| **Costume Designer** | A costume designer chooses or makes the clothes that each character will wear in the opera. | **Questions for the Costume Designer to Consider:**
  - Who are the characters in the scene?
  - Where are they? What is the time period? What is the weather like?
  - How will the characters need to move in their costumes?
  - What is the mood or feeling that you want to convey with the costume choices?
  - What questions do you have for the characters that might impact how they would be dressed? | **Activity:** Choose a few characters from your scene and draw a sketch of what their costumes might look like. Remember to document details such as colors, types of fabrics, etc. |
| **SET DESIGNER** | A set designer creates the scenery and set pieces that represent specific locations in the opera and help to tell the story visually.  

**Questions for the Set Designer to Consider:**  
- What is the setting of this scene? Where does it take place and what is the time period?  
- Does this scene take place inside or outside?  
- What is the central focus?  
- What is in the background?  

**Activity:** Create a drawing of the set pieces that you would like to include in your scene. You may have one central set piece (such as a room inside of a house) or several smaller set pieces (such as a town square). Remember to include details about the materials used, colors, textures, etc. |

| **PROP MASTER** | A prop master is responsible for providing props or items in a scene other than the costumes or sets. Like sets and costumes, these props help to tell the story and action visually.  

**Questions for the Prop Master to Consider:**  
- What is the setting of this scene?  
- Who are the characters in the scene?  
- Will any of the characters need specific items to help tell the story?  
- What questions do you have for the characters, director or set designer that will impact what items are needed onstage?  

**Activity:** Make a list of the props you would like to include in your scene. Remember to include small handheld items (such as a book or pair of glasses), as well as larger items like furniture. |

| **PUBLICIST** | A publicist is responsible for publicizing or advertising the opera, using visual, aural and/or print materials to convince people to attend and buy tickets.  

**Questions for the Publicist to Consider:**  
- What is this scene about?  
- What is the most exciting detail you can share with the audience?  
- What descriptive words can you use to convey the emotion and mood in this scene?  

**Activity:** Use words and/or images to create a poster or press release advertising your opera scene. |
# COLLABORATION SELF-ASSESSMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEAMWORK GOALS</th>
<th>Exemplary</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Needs Improvement</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PARTICIPATION:</strong> I participated fully in all group discussions and encouraged my team members.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SHARED RESPONSIBILITY:</strong> I completed all assigned tasks and volunteered to help the others in my group.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONTRIBUTIONS:</strong> I listened respectfully to my team members, contributed ideas and helped my group finish the task(s).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PROBLEM-SOLVING:</strong> I actively looked for and suggested solutions, and worked with my team members to solve problems.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GROUP TEAMWORK:</strong> I always displayed a positive attitude and supported my team members in accomplishing our goal.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In my group today, we accomplished ...

In my group today, I am proud of the way I ...

One thing I would change or improve on is ...
## COLLABORATION RUBRIC

### CATEGORY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Exemplary</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Needs Improvement</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Fully engaged and contributes a lot to discussions and tasks; encourages the efforts of others in the group</td>
<td>Participates in group discussions and tasks; frequently shares ideas and respects those of others in the group</td>
<td>Mainly listens, but does what is required</td>
<td>Sometimes chooses not to participate; displays a lack of interest or disrespect for others</td>
<td>__/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Responsibility</td>
<td>Follows through on all assigned tasks, takes a lead role in contributing ideas and often volunteers to help others</td>
<td>Follows through on most assigned tasks and usually contributes ideas to the group</td>
<td>Must be reminded to stay on task and sometimes depends on others to do the work</td>
<td>Seldom or never follows through on assigned tasks; depends on others to do all of the work</td>
<td>__/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful and Positive Contributions</td>
<td>Respectfully listens, contributes ideas and poses questions during discussions; helps direct the group accomplishing the goal</td>
<td>Respectfully listens, interacts, discusses and poses questions to others during discussions</td>
<td>Has some difficulty listening and discussing; tends to dominate discussions</td>
<td>Has great difficulty listening, argues and/or is unwilling to consider other opinions</td>
<td>__/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-Solving</td>
<td>Actively looks for and suggests solutions to problems; asks peers for help on things he/she does not understand</td>
<td>Occasionally makes suggestions and is willing to try solutions suggested by others</td>
<td>Rarely suggests solutions; often asks the teacher for help instead of peers</td>
<td>Does not offer any solutions and does not assist others in the problem-solving process</td>
<td>__/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Teamwork</td>
<td>Always has a positive attitude; takes a lead role in making sure all group members are working together toward a common goal</td>
<td>Usually has a positive attitude; contributes to the group in accomplishing a common goal</td>
<td>Occasionally is critical of the task or the work of other group members but participates in accomplishing the goal</td>
<td>Has difficulty getting along with others and is often negative or critical; impedes the group from accomplishing the goal</td>
<td>__/3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX
Standards Addressed in the Lesson

National Core Arts

- Creating — Conceiving and developing new artistic ideas and work.
- Performing/Presenting/Producing — Realizing artistic ideas and work through interpretation and presentation.
- Responding — Understanding and evaluating how the arts convey meaning.
- Connecting — Relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context.

Career and College Readiness Anchor Standards

- CCRA.R.2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
- CCRA.R.3: Analyze how and why individuals, events and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
- CCRA.R.7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
- CCRA.W.7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- CCRA.W.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection and research.
- CCRA.SL.1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- CCRA.SL.2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively and orally.
- CCRA.SL.4: Present information, findings and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and that the organization, development and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.
- CCRA.SL.5: Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.
APPENDIX

Vocabulary

**Character** — a person portrayed in an artistic piece such as a play, novel, opera, comic book, movie or television show

**Costume** — a distinctive style of dress for characters in a play, musical, opera or film

**Costume Designer** — one who designs the clothes or costumes that each character will wear

**Director** — one who prepares an opera, play or film for production by arranging the details of the stage settings and by instructing the performers in the interpretation of their roles

**Mood** — the general emotional tone of a piece of music, a character or a scene

**Opera** — a play that is sung and set to music

**Props** — short for “properties,” props are articles other than costumes or scenery used as part of the dramatic production

**Prop Master** — the artist who is responsible for providing props (items in a scene other than the costumes or sets) used as a part of the dramatic production

**Publicist** — one who is responsible for publicizing or advertising an event; one who draws attention to something

**Scene** — a subdivision of an act, with its own setting and continuous flow of time

**Set** — a specific physical unit of scenery, representing a particular location

**Set Designer** — one who designs sets to achieve visual assistance in storytelling

**Setting** — the location where a theatrical action takes place