Story to Song Unit Plan

Lesson 1 — The Drama of Opera: Character and Story with Student Worksheet

Lesson 2 — The Creation of Opera: Lyrics and Song with Student Worksheet

Lesson 3 — The Process of Opera: Rehearsal and Performance with Student Worksheet and Teacher Assessment Rubric

Appendix — National Core Arts and Common Core Standards List

Appendix — Vocabulary List

Objective

- Through an exploration of tableaus, singing, collaborative group activities and a culminating performance, students will engage in the process of creating an opera and discover the power of music to tell stories.

Essential Questions

- How can we represent characters and story in an opera scene?
- How can we build community by working and singing together?
- How do musical elements help us tell a story?
- How can we prepare for and reflect on a live classroom performance?

Learning Goals

- Students will act out key scenes of a story and will articulate words to describe what type of music would effectively match the mood of the scene.
- Students will use the descriptions of the scenes to create original text and improvise melodies using the lyrics.
- Students will compose an original opera aria using their original text and perform the aria with staging for their peers.

Time Required

- Three hours (three 60-minute lessons)

Room Setup

- Open space for students to move around the room

Notes to Teachers

Grade Level — These lessons are specifically designed for elementary-age students, grades three to five. However, the content can be modified for older students (grades six to eight and nine to 12) by choosing an age-appropriate story, or by using more rigorous source texts, such as works of literature, folktales, creative writing assignments, or historical events or figures.

Lesson Extensions — You may choose to extend these lessons by completing the Musical Extension activities located at the end of the lessons.

Collaboration — Collaboration figures prominently in these lessons. For more collaboration activities, go to operaamerica.org/NOTES.
Lesson 1 — The Drama of Opera: Character and Story

Objective: Students explore characters, tableaus and musical ideas to enhance understanding of storytelling through opera.

Time Required: 60 minutes (one 10-minute, one 20-minute and one 30-minute activity)

Vocabulary: characters, mood, setting, tableau

Materials

- Hansel and Gretel synopsis or use a version of the story available in your local library
- Whiteboard or large paper and markers for displaying words
- Student Worksheet: Creating Musical Moods
- Opera excerpts (optional for Musical Extension)
- iPod, smartphone, tablet, computer with speakers (optional for Musical Extension)

Activity 1: Introduce Characters, Mood and Setting in Hansel and Gretel (10 minutes)

- Review the story of Hansel and Gretel, focusing on the ending when Hansel and Gretel trick the Witch.
- Identify the characters (Hansel, Gretel, Witch). Who are the characters in this story?
- Identify the setting (in the Witch’s gingerbread house). Where are the characters?
- Identify the mood. What might the characters be feeling?

Activity 2: Explore Story Through Tableaus (20 minutes)

- Split the class into small groups of students (at least three students per group). Modification: With younger children, you may wish to choose students to perform in front of the class.
- Introduce students to tableaus by having them create still pictures of everyday scenes using no words, but only their bodies. Have them identify where the scene takes place, who is in the scene and what they are feeling. (e.g., in the lunchroom, on the playground, on family vacation)
- Now have students create original tableaus for scenes from Hansel and Gretel. Assign each group one of the following three scenes:
  - Scene 1: Hansel and Gretel plot to trick the Witch
  - Scene 2: Hansel and Gretel push the Witch into the fire
  - Scene 3: Hansel and Gretel celebrate
- If time allows, have each group perform their tableaus for the rest of the class.
Activity 3: Adding Musical Moods (30 minutes)

- Have one group perform their tableau.
- As a class, discuss the following questions:
  - How would you describe this scene?
  - Who are the characters?
  - What are they doing?
  - What do you think they are feeling at this moment?
  - If we were to add music to this scene, what would the music sound like?
- Have students brainstorm suggestions for how to describe the scene and how the music could express the mood and characters. Answers may include dramatic words such as “tense,” “celebratory” and “exciting,” or musical words such as “fast,” “slow,” “staccato (short),” “quiet” or “loud.”
- Encourage students to use their voices to create sounds that match the words they suggest.
- Repeat for each tableau.
- Record student answers on a whiteboard or large paper. You may also choose to have each student record the ideas for their tableau using the Student Worksheet: Creating Musical Moods.

Musical Extension – Exploring Musical Scenes from Operas:

- Share examples from operas that represent different characters, moods and settings, such as:
  - Bizet — “Votre toast” from Carmen (a bullfighter’s song)
  - Verdi — “Si, pel ciel marmoreo giuro!” from Otello (a song of plotting revenge)
  - Verdi — “Libiamo ne’lieti calici” from La traviata (a party song)
  - Puccini — “O soave fanciulla” from La bohème (love duet)
  - If possible, play the examples on the piano or another instrument.
## Creating Musical Moods

### Describe the Scene

**What is your scene about?**

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

### Describe the Characters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who are the characters in your scene?</th>
<th>What are they doing?</th>
<th>How do you think they are feeling at this moment?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Create a Musical Mood

**What are two words that describe the mood of your scene?**

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

**If you were to add music to demonstrate the mood, what sounds would you use? What would the music sound like?**
Lesson 2 — The Creation of Opera: Lyrics and Song

Objective: Students create original text and improvise melodies for their tableau opera scenes.

Time Required: 60 minutes (two 30-minute activities)

Vocabulary: dialogue, gesture, lyrics, improvisation

Materials: Student Worksheet: Creating Text and Dialogue <provide download link>

Activity 1: Creating Text and Dialogue (30 minutes)

- Working in the same tableau groups and using the scene descriptions from Lesson 1, have students create text to describe their scene. Encourage students to create a short dialogue between characters, using about 10 words per character to keep the text short. Suggested prompts include:
  - What 10 words best describe what is happening in your scene?
  - How can you use more descriptive words to represent the mood and characters?
  - What might characters be saying to each other?

  Modification — You can do this activity as a large group and create one text for the entire class.

- Have students document their text on the Student Worksheet: Creating Text and Dialogue.

- Have students share their text with the class.

Activity 2: Improvising Text to Song (30 minutes)

- In opera, lines of text are often sung or performed in a special way to communicate the feelings and thoughts of a character. This text becomes the lyrics for a song. All of the lyrics become the libretto of the opera.

- Play a simple call and response game as a class. Choose a line to speak and have the students repeat it. Lines can represent everyday actions (e.g., "I can’t wait for lunch today. I really hope it’s pizza!") Each time you speak the line, use a different quality of voice; for example, say it quietly, shout it, sing it or say it in a funny voice.

- Practice improvising different lines through call and response as a class and have student volunteers demonstrate in various voices. Be sure to encourage some students to sing the line.

- Working within each tableau group, assign each student a character and have students practice their original libretto three times.
  - The first time students say the text only.
  - The second time students say the text and add a gesture.
  - The third time students sing the text and add a gesture.
• Play this game a few times so that students have time to experiment with various gestures and improvise with singing the text in different ways. You may choose to have students record their improvisations for future reference.

• Remind students that this is an exercise to get comfortable singing in front of others and that there should be no judgment about the quality of the singing.

• If time allows, repeat this activity for each of the tableaus.
Creating Text and Dialogue

REVISE YOUR SCENE DESCRIPTION

Look at your original scene description from Lesson 1. What are some other words that you can use to describe the mood and action?

________________________  ______________________  ______________________

________________________  ______________________  ______________________

Now, use some of your new, descriptive words to rewrite your scene description in the spaces below. Keep your sentence to about 10 words or less.

________________________  ______________________  ______________________  ______________________  ______________________  ______________________

________________________  ______________________  ______________________  ______________________  ______________________  ______________________.

CREATE DIALOGUE

Choose two characters from your scene. Think about what they are doing in the scene and what they might be feeling. What do you think they might be saying? Write a sentence for each character. Be sure to use proper spelling and punctuation.

Character #1: ________________________________

Character #2: ________________________________
Lesson 3 — The Process of Opera: Rehearsal and Performance

Objective: Students compose original melody using existing text and set parameters.

Time Required: 60 minutes (one 10-minute activity, two 15-minute activities and one 20-minute activity)

Vocabulary: compose, melody

Materials

• Objects in the classroom that can be used to make sound (a box of paperclips, newspaper, pens and pencils, etc.)
• Teacher Worksheet: Opera Scene Performance Assessment Rubric
• Student Worksheet: My Composition
• Recording of Engelbert Humperdinck’s Hansel and Gretel, Scene III (optional for Musical Extension)
• iPod, smartphone, tablet, computer with speakers (optional for Musical Extension)

Activity 1: Composing a Soundscape for Opera Scenes (15 minutes)

• Within the tableau groups, students will have 15 minutes to compose the melody for their texts.
• Encourage students to use melodies they improvised in Lesson 2.
• The parameters for composing the melody are:
  ▪ Students must use their voices.
  ▪ Students can use any other found object that makes sound (rhythm instruments, newspaper, box of paperclips, etc.) or body percussion.
  ▪ Students must include at least one note that is held for five seconds.
  ▪ Students must repeat at least one line several times.
  ▪ Students must all sing together at least one time.

Activity 2: Rehearsing (10 minutes)

• In their tableau groups, students then have 10 minutes to rehearse their compositions.
• Encourage students to also include the gestures from the tableaus.
• If time and space allows, encourage students to explore where each character stands and how they move.
• Walk around the room and help students revise their work as they rehearse.
Activity 3: Performing (15 minutes)

- Have each group perform their musical tableau for the class.
- Record the performances for an opportunity to document and assess student learning using the Teacher Worksheet: Opera Scene Performance Assessment Rubric.

Activity 4: Reflection on Process and Performance (20 minutes)

- After each group performs, ask the audience:
  - What did you notice in the performance?
  - What surprised you by their performance?
  - Which line did they repeat?
  - Did the group sing together for the entire time or did they take turns singing alone?
- After all the groups perform, ask students:
  - How were these performances similar?
  - How were they different?
  - After seeing what the other groups did, how would you change your own performance? What might you add or remove?
- Have students reflect on their own experiences using the Student Worksheet: My Composition Checklist.

Musical Extension — Notating Compositions:

- If desired, notate the music that the class created using one of the following:
  - Standard music notation
  - Nontraditional notation, such as drawing the melodic contour (using a line to show the highs and lows of the melody)
  - If students are working on Orff instruments, create a color-coded score.

Musical Extension — Compare and Contrast:

- Play the original music from Engelbert Humperdinck’s opera Hansel and Gretel, Scene III.
- Lead a discussion of how Humperdinck’s music is similar and different from the class’ compositions.
# My Composition Checklist

Check the box if the answer is yes, and use the blank space to fill in the details.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How did I use my voice today?</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
<th>Singing Alone</th>
<th>Singing with Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What types of instruments did I use?</th>
<th>Found Object</th>
<th>Body Percussion</th>
<th>Musical Instrument</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What elements did my composition include?</th>
<th>Did I hold a note for at least five seconds?</th>
<th>Did I repeat a line at least four times?</th>
<th>Did we sing together as a group?</th>
<th>Did we include gestures in our performance?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What did I do well today? ________________________________________________________________

What did the class do well today? ________________________________________________________

What can I improve on? ________________________________________________________________

What can the class improve on? _________________________________________________________

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THE NATIONAL OPERA CENTER AMERICA
# OPERA SCENE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

*Note: You may use this rubric to assess students as a group or individually.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>Exemplary</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Needs Improvement</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
<th>POINTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creativity and Originality</td>
<td>Willing to try new ideas and take risks; uses an imaginative, unique approach</td>
<td>Takes some risks and generates a few new ideas, but plays it safe and relies mostly on existing concepts</td>
<td>Generates few unique ideas and finds it difficult to go beyond cliches or previous concepts</td>
<td>Unwilling to experiment; most ideas are copied and unoriginal</td>
<td>___/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Responsibility and Cooperation</td>
<td>Follows through on all assigned tasks, and all participants take turns contributing ideas</td>
<td>Follows through on assigned tasks, and most members contribute ideas to the group</td>
<td>Must be reminded to stay on task, and some students depend on others to do the work</td>
<td>Seldom or never follows through on assigned tasks; most members depend on one person to do all of the work</td>
<td>___/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singing and Improvisation</td>
<td>Performs original text with an improvised melody using a clear singing voice and adds gesture(s)</td>
<td>Performs original text and attempts to sing an improvised melody and/or add a gesture</td>
<td>Performs original text, but does not use a singing voice or incorporate a gesture</td>
<td>Does not perform</td>
<td>___/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composition</td>
<td>Includes original or imaginative musical ideas; explores and incorporates all of the musical parameters</td>
<td>Involves some original aspects of musical ideas; explores some of the musical parameters</td>
<td>Some new musical ideas are present, but there is little exploration or incorporation of the musical parameters</td>
<td>Musical idea is unoriginal, and none of the musical parameters are met</td>
<td>___/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience Behavior</td>
<td>Pays close attention to performance(s); encourages performers and responds appropriately (i.e., clapping)</td>
<td>Mostly pays attention to performance(s) and provides appropriate responses</td>
<td>Somewhat distracted; polite but does not actively encourage and support performers</td>
<td>Does not pay attention to performers; is impolite and/or provides inappropriate responses</td>
<td>___/3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL** ___/15
APPENDIX

Standards Addressed in the Lessons

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.6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style 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.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.
- CCRA.W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.
- CCRA.W.10: Write routinely over extended timeframes (time for research, reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes and audiences.
- 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.6: Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.
- CCRA.L.1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
- CCRA.L.3: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.
- CCRA.L.5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meanings.
APPENDIX

Vocabulary

Characters — People portrayed in an artistic piece such as a play, story, novel, opera, comic book, movie or television show

Compose — to write music

Dialogue — a conversation between two or more characters

Gesture — a physical action that is not full-body; usually made with the hands, arms or face

Improvisation — the art of spontaneous performance

Libretto — Italian for “little book,” the opera’s text, as sung by the characters

Lyrics — the words in a song or aria; the poetic structure in a libretto

Melody — a line of music; the primary phrase that stands out above all accompaniment

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

Setting — the location where a theatrical action takes place

Tableau — a still picture of an action moment