

## 5.1 CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: MUSICAL MOODS

Suggested time: 30–40 minutes

This activity helps students learn the definition of opera and identify elements of the art form.

### ❖ PROCEDURE

1. Building on the improvisation activities of Step 3 and the story elements explored in Step 4, discuss the concept that stories can be told in words, actions, sounds, pictures, videos, and other media.
2. Explain that a story told through music and dramatic action is called an **opera**.
3. Encourage student discussion of how a story told through multiple storytelling means (such as music, dramatic action, visual design, etc.) can provide more information to the listener, and can make for a more compelling experience.
4. Explore the following concepts with students, using age-appropriate examples. (Some examples are suggested below; others are available through the school media center, public library, or on YouTube or Netflix.)
  - Music can illustrate **subtext** and **duality**, and demonstrate a secret side of the characters to the audience. Suggested example: “If I Loved You” from *Carousel*, in which the characters Billy and Julie maintain they don’t love each other, while falling in love during the duet.
  - Music can indicate a character’s thoughts and can shift the audience’s mood. Suggested examples: *Star Wars: A New Hope*. Listen for the musical indication of Luke’s decision to travel with Obi-Wan Kenobi to Alderaan. This comes shortly after Luke has discovered the burned out remains of his aunt and uncle’s farm, when he looks out over the landscape with Tatooine’s twin suns in the background. Contrast this with the music associated with the Death Star. What does the music tell viewers about the Death Star?
  - Music can provide commentary on the on-stage or on-screen action. Suggested example: the use of Barber’s “Adagio for Strings” in the movie *Platoon*. What does the contrast of the music’s serenity against the brutality of the rescue scene tell viewers?
  - Music can describe action. Suggested example: In Warner Brothers’ classic Wile E. Coyote cartoons, the music provides an exact description of the action represented on screen.

- Music can provide the theme of the story or scene. Suggested example: The opening war scene in the movie *Gladiator* where the violence on screen is accompanied by a waltz. This **duality** creates a repulsion of war that wouldn't be there without the music.
- Music provides another language for love or hate, and can help exaggerate those feelings. Suggested example: The scene in the piano store from the movie *Once*. Another example: "The Confrontation" from *Les Misérables*.
- Music can provide a character's emotional history. Suggested example: The opening of Act III in Puccini's *Tosca*, in which the jailed Cavaradossi sings of his love for Tosca by remembering their loving encounters in the garden.

### EXTENSION

For homework, working individually or in small groups, have students:

- Write a short essay or prepare a brief presentation on how music plays a role in telling stories on reality TV.
- Select a pop song that tells a story, has a narrative, and/or displays a character in a dramatic situation, and write a short essay or prepare a brief presentation on how it does so.
- Write a short essay or prepare a brief presentation that contrasts the use of third person narrative in sung storytelling with the use of first person narrative. One paired example: "Eleanor Rigby" and "Yesterday," both by The Beatles.

### EVALUATION

As students complete this activity, ask questions such as:

- How does the music tell us these things?
- What does the music let us know about these characters and what they think or feel?