

Enriching the Humanities Through Opera

Title: Responding to Key Scenes

Grade Level: 9-12th

Length: 45 minutes

Literary Work: *Romeo and Juliet* (William Shakespeare)

Opera: *Roméo et Juliette* (Charles Gounod, composer; Jules Barbier and Michel Carré, librettists)

Inquiry Question: How can poetry and music enhance a key scene in a story?

Lesson Focus: This lesson will focus on responding to the context in a key scene or turning point in the opera by devising a poem based on a character's emotions in that moment.

Prior Knowledge: Students have read *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare), have analyzed characters and can name the (Who, What, When, Where), have participated in the previous adaptation lesson.

Materials: Copies of *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare), presentation slides (includes *Roméo et Juliette* short opera synopsis with video examples and libretto excerpts), poetic devices definitions handout, libretto excerpts of key scenes, interactive board, paper, and pens/pencils.

Key Vocabulary: Aria, poetic devices (rhyme, repetition, meter, alliteration, metaphor, simile, imagery, personification, onomatopoeia, etc.)

Definitions

- **Aria:** A self-contained piece for solo voice typically found in opera, oratorio, and cantata. It typically showcases the vocal abilities of the singer and often serves as a moment of introspection or emotional expression for the character.
- **Poetic Devices:** Refers to techniques and tools used by poets to create a desired effect in their writing. These devices include features such as rhyme, meter, metaphor, simile, alliteration, imagery, and symbolism, among others. Each device helps to enhance the meaning, emotions, or aesthetics of a poem.
 - **Rhyme:** Where words have similar sounds, usually at the end of the word, creating a harmonious and pleasing effect in poetry or song lyrics.
 - **Symbolism:** The use of symbols to represent ideas or qualities, often conveying deeper meanings or emotions beyond literal interpretation. Symbols can be objects, images, words, or gestures that carry symbolic significance and are used to enhance the meaning of a text, artwork, or communication.

Repetition: Refers to the deliberate use of the same word, phrase, line, or stanza multiple times within a poem. This technique helps emphasize certain ideas or themes, create rhythm, and establish a sense of unity or structure.

- **Meter:** Refers to the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a line of verse. It provides a rhythmic structure and helps to create a sense of musicality in the poem. Different poetic forms and styles may have varying meters, such as iambic pentameter or trochaic tetrameter.
- **Alliteration:** The repetition of the same sound at the beginning of neighboring words in a sentence or phrase. It is often used in poetry, literature, and advertising to create a rhythm or musical effect.
- **Metaphor:** A figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable to imply a resemblance, typically for rhetorical or expressive effect.
- **Simile:** A figure of speech in which two things are compared using "like" or "as" to show similarities between them. It is used to make descriptions more vivid and engaging by creating a clear image in the reader's mind.
- **Imagery:** Refers to the use of descriptive language that appeals to the senses, creating vivid mental images for the reader or listener. This technique helps to evoke emotions, set the mood, and enhance the overall meaning.
- **Personification:** Refers to the use of human characteristics or qualities attributed to animals, objects, or abstract concepts. This technique is used to give non-human entities human-like traits to create vivid imagery or convey deeper meanings.
- **Onomatopoeia:** A word that phonetically imitates, resembles or suggests the sound that it describes, such as "buzz," "meow," or "splash." It is a figure of speech that uses words to mimic the sounds of the real world, creating a sensory experience for the reader or listener.

Objective(s): At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify characters' emotions and responses in a key scene.
- Identify poetic devices found in presented examples.
- Create a poem, at least four lines in length, using two poetic devices to represent a character's response to a key scene in the work.
- Demonstrate their understanding of their chosen key scene through their poems.

Assessment: Evaluate students' understanding of their chosen key scene and character from their writing of a minimum of four-line poems incorporating at least two poetic devices.

Assessment Rubric

4: The student's poem is highly creative, effectively uses at least two poetic devices, and is well-structured with descriptive language demonstrating understanding of character's emotions and response to action in key scene.

3: The student's poem is moderately creative, uses at least two poetic devices, and is mostly well-structured with some understanding of character's emotions and response to action in key scene.

2: The student's poem lacks creativity, struggles to incorporate poetic devices, and is poorly structured with minimal understanding of character's emotions and response to action in key scene.

1: The student's poem lacks creativity, fails to use poetic devices, and is poorly structured with a significant lack of understanding of character's emotions and response to action in key scene.

Learning Standards:

Common Core State Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5: Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on other's ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3: Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3: Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.5: Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.6: Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).

National Core Arts Standards

MU:Cn10.o.T.Ia. Demonstrate how interests, knowledge, and skills relate to personal choice and intent when creating, performing, and responding to music.

MU:Cn11.o.T.Ia. Demonstrate understanding of relationships between music and the other arts, other disciplines, varied contexts, and daily life.

TH:Cr2-II.a. Refine a dramatic concept to demonstrate a critical understanding of historical and cultural influences of original ideas applied to a drama/theatre work.

TH:Pr4.1.I.a. Examine how character relationships assist in telling the story of a drama/theatre work.

TH:Pr4.1.I.b. Shape character choices using given circumstances in a drama/theatre work.

TH:Re7.1.I.a. Respond to what is seen, felt, and heard in a drama/theatre work to develop criteria for artistic choices.

Procedure:

Introduction/Hook (5 minutes):

- Begin with a listening activity of an excerpt from Romeo’s Act II aria, “Ah! lève-toi, soleil! (Ah, arise, o sun!).”
 - [PBS LearningMedia™](#) : Roméo et Juliette | Act II | The Metropolitan Opera: 03:10 – 05:39
 - Have students first listen to the music without text displayed on board and take notes of the emotions being expressed in the music.
 - Discuss findings and make a list of answers to create an emotion vocabulary “toolbox.”

Main Narrative/Sequence (20 minutes):

- Explain that this aria or duet comes from the opera *Roméo et Juliette*.
 - Read/Review opera’s short synopsis found in the presentation slides.
- Display aria/duet text and translation on board. Have students listen again either following along with the text or watching a video performance and taking note of any new ideas.
 - Identify the character(s) singing and the emotions expressed.
 - Compare initial reaction to new understanding.
 - Ask questions such as, “How does viewing the text change your understanding?” “Does knowing the character singing change your understanding?” “How does the text and music add to your understanding of the scene?”
- Discuss/review the definitions and use of poetic devices.
 - Show examples of several poetic devices on the board (rhyme, repetition, meter, alliteration, metaphor, simile, imagery, personification, etc.)
 - Ask students to identify poetic devices in the examples.
 - Presentation slides include "A Poison Tree" by William Blake, and excerpts from “Almots” by Bianca Phipps and Romeo’s Act II aria, “Ah! lève-toi, soleil! (Ah, arise, o sun!).”
- Discuss guidelines for response poems:

- Poems should be at least four lines in length, from one of the characters' perspectives in the scene using at least two poetic devices.
- Show an example of a response poem to Romeo's Act II aria, "Ah! lève-toi, soleil! (Ah, arise, o sun!)."
 - Identify the character who could have written the poem, as well as their emotions and response to the action in the scene.

Activity/Practice (12 minutes):

- Students, independently, write a response poem based on this lesson's key scene/aria or their chosen key scene from the Exploring Story Adaptation lesson.
 - Exploring Story Adaptation lesson key scenes: Students can review their chosen key scenes and identify the characters' emotions and responses to the action in the scene. Students will choose a character's point of view, how the character feels about the initial aria, and their response. Students can take into consideration how their adaptation choices may influence the character's response.

Present/Share (5 minutes):

- Willing students share or perform a dramatic reading of their poems in front of class.
 - Encourage students to explore the musical aspects of their poem when performing (e.g. rhythm, tempo, inflection/intonation, etc.)

Reflection (3 minutes):

- Reflect on how poetry and music can enhance the scene, and what was learned in viewing and presenting poems. Ask and discuss:
 - "How does poetry and music enhance the scene?"
 - "What did you learn from viewing and presenting our response poems?"

Extension/Follow Up/Next Steps:

- Create a soundscape/backing track using garage band or chrome music or curate a playlist for the key scene to support the mood and action.
- Students can write response poems/arias for the key scene they created adaptation pitches for in the Exploring Story Adaptation lesson.

***Roméo et Juliette* (1867)**

Charles Gounod, composer; Jules Barbier and Michel Carré, librettists

Romeo and Juliet is a turducken of adaptation, an Italian poem, to an English poem, to a play, to an opera and more! Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is in itself an adaptation. Written circa 1594–6, *Romeo and Juliet* is Shakespeare's earliest tragedy other than the remarkably violent *Titus Andronicus*. For his source material, he turned to an earlier narrative poem by the English writer Arthur Brooke, "The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet" from 1562. Brooke in turn had been inspired by a story by the Italian poet Mateo Bandello—some of whose other tales made their way into Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Twelfth Night*.

Gounod's librettists, Jules Barbier and Michel Carré, closely followed Shakespeare's text, often using direct translations of the original's expressions and metaphors. As a whole, the opera condenses the action of the play and focuses it more tightly on the story of the two lovers.

Short Synopsis

The opera *Roméo et Juliette*, based on Shakespeare's play, tells the story of Romeo and Juliet, two teenagers from the feuding Montague and Capulet families. They meet at a ball, fall in love, and secretly marry, knowing their families will never approve. After Romeo kills Juliet's cousin in a street fight, he is forced into hiding to escape the Capulets' vengeance. Meanwhile, Juliet fakes her own death to avoid an arranged marriage, but the plan goes tragically wrong. Within a few days, the drama culminates in the tragic deaths of both Romeo and Juliet.

ROMÉO ET JULIETTE SYNOPSIS

Charles Gounod, composer; Jules Barbier and Michel Carré, librettists

PROLOGUE

A chorus tells of an endless feud between two great families, the Montagues and the Capulets, and the young Roméo and Juliette, whose tragic love brought the feud to an end.

ACT I *Verona.*

A lavish masked ball is taking place at the Capulet palace. Tybalt, a Capulet gentleman, assures the wealthy Count Pâris that his cousin Juliette's beauty is beyond compare. When Juliette arrives, Lord Capulet presents his daughter to the guests. Roméo, a Montague, sneaks in with his friends Mercutio and Benvolio. Roméo is nervous about entering the Capulet residence: He has had a strange dream that he thinks may be a premonition of some great misfortune. Mercutio dismisses the dream as mere fancy, the work of the fairy Queen Mab. Soon, however, Roméo sees Juliette. He is instantly entranced. Juliette, meanwhile, knows that her father wants her to marry Pâris, and she confides in her nurse, Gertrude, that she has no interest in marriage. But when Juliette sees Roméo, she is deeply intrigued by this handsome stranger. They find a moment to speak alone. Although they are both shocked to discover that the other is a member of the rival family, they cannot deny their mutual attraction. Tybalt appears. Roméo puts on his mask to avoid being recognized and rushes off, but the proud, quarrelsome Tybalt has already recognized the intruder as Montague's son. He wishes to chase after Roméo, but Capulet restrains him, ordering the party to continue.

ACT II *Juliette's garden, that evening.*

Roméo enters the Capulets' garden looking for Juliette. When she appears on her balcony, he steps forward and declares his love. Servants briefly interrupt their encounter, but once they are alone again, they make plans for a secret wedding.

ACT III *Frère Laurent's church, dawn the following morning.*

Roméo comes to Frère Laurent's cell, followed shortly by Juliette and Gertrude. At first, Frère Laurent is shocked to see Montague and a Capulet together. But finally, convinced of the strength of their love, the priest agrees to marry them. He hopes that the union will end the fighting between their families.

A street in Verona.

Outside the Capulets' palace, Roméo's page, Stéphano, sings a song mocking the Capulets, provoking the Capulets to attack him. Mercutio intercedes to protect Stéphano, and soon the skirmish escalates into a violent swordfight between Mercutio and Tybalt. Just then, Roméo arrives on his way home from the church. He begs Tybalt and Mercutio to forget about the hatred between their families, but when Tybalt kills Mercutio, Roméo furiously stabs and kills him. The Duke of Verona arrives, with the Montagues and Capulets hot on his heels. Both of the families are outraged and demand justice—the Montagues for Mercutio, the Capulets for Tybalt. The Duke, for his part, is primarily concerned with preventing future skirmishes from destroying the city's peace.

He refuses to execute Roméo, but he does banish the young man from the city, declaring that if Roméo is seen again inside Verona's walls, he will die.

ACT IV *Juliette's bedroom, early the following morning.*

Roméo and Juliette have spent a secret wedding night together. She forgives him for killing Tybalt, and they promise to love each other forever. Then, as a lark outside the window announces the arrival of day, Roméo reluctantly leaves for his exile. Capulet enters and tells his daughter that she must marry Pâris that very day. She tries to argue with her father, but, unmoved by his daughter's tears, Capulet angrily tells his daughter to prepare for the wedding. Juliette is left alone with Frère Laurent, whom she desperately begs to help her. Although he is at first reluctant to meddle, Frère Laurent finally gives Juliette a sleeping potion that will make her appear dead. He promises to write a letter to Roméo explaining the potion and his plan to help Juliette avoid her marriage. The letter will also invite Roméo to return secretly to Verona; when Juliette awakens, Roméo will be by her side. Together, they will flee the city and embark on a new life. Juliette is terrified, but she drinks the potion. When Capulet and the guests arrive to lead Juliet to the chapel for her wedding, she collapses.

ACT V *The Capulets' family tomb.*

Despite Frère Laurent's careful planning, his letter has gone astray, and when news reaches Roméo of Juliette's burial, he believes that she is truly dead. Crazed with grief, Roméo arrives at the Capulet crypt carrying a bottle of deadly poison. He has no desire to continue living, and he drinks the poison. At that very moment, Juliette wakes up. She is overjoyed to see Roméo, and together the young lovers imagine a happy future. Just as they are about to leave the crypt, however, Roméo staggers and falls. With horror, Juliette realizes that he is dying. Drawing a dagger from Roméo's belt, Juliette stabs herself.

Synopsis courtesy of the Metropolitan Opera.

Key Scene/Aria in Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette*

Video excerpts and timestamps are pulled from the Metropolitan Opera on Demand and PBS LearningMedia™. Performance Date: Jan. 21, 2017

KEY SCENE/ARIA: Act II: Scene 1, No. 7: "Ah! lève-toi, soleil! (Ah, arise, o sun!)" (Excerpt)

[Met Opera on Demand](#): Track #19. ACT II: L'amour! L'amour! ... Ah! lève-toi soleil!
00:00 – 02:29

OR

[PBS LearningMedia™](#) : Roméo et Juliette | Act II | The Metropolitan Opera
03:10 – 05:39

After their meeting in Act I, Romeo stands in Juliet's garden beneath her balcony, proclaiming his love for her.

Libretto Excerpt

ROMÉO	ROMEO
L'amour, l'amour!	Love! Love!
Oui, son ardeur a troublé tout mon être!	Ay, its intensity has disturbed my very
<i>(La fenêtre de Juliette s'éclaire.)</i>	being!
Mais quelle soudaine clarté	<i>(A light comes on in Juliet's window.)</i>
Resplendit à cette fenêtre?	But what sudden light
C'est là que dans la nuit rayonne sa	through yonder window breaks?
beauté!	'Tis there that by night her beauty shines!
Ah! lève-toi, soleil! fais pâlir les étoiles	Ah, arise, o sun! Turn pale the stars
Qui, dans l'azur sans voiles,	that, unveiled in the azure,
Brillent au firmament,	do sparkle in the firmament.
Ah! lève-toi! paradis! paradis!	Ah, arise! Ah, arise! Appear! Appear,
Astre pur et charmant!	thou pure and enchanting star!
Elle rêve! elle dénoue	She is dreaming, she loosens
Une boucle de cheveux	a lock of hair
Qui vient caresser sa joue.	which falls to caress her cheek.
Amour! Amour! porte-lui mes vœux!	Love! Love, carry my vows to her!

Libretto excerpt courtesy of [DM's Opera Site](#).

Poetic Devices used: repetition, imagery, metaphor, personification, symbolism, alliteration

RESPONSE POEM EXAMPLE

Is this what everyone speaks of as love?
A love so tempting from one light kiss
My brain says no, my heart says yes
Desire climbing the walls to reach my heart
Creating a battle between desire and family
This must be love.

Poetic devices used: metaphor, personification, repetition, symbolism