

Enriching the Humanities Through Opera

Title: Responding to Key Scenes

Grade Level: 9-12th

Length: 45 minutes

Literary Works: *One Hundred Years of Solitude*; *Love in the Time of Cholera* (Gabriel García Márquez)

Opera: *Florencia en el Amazonas (Florence in the Amazon)* (Daniel Catán, composer; Marcela Fuentes-Berain, librettist)

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 *One Hundred Years of Solitude* or *Love in the Time of Cholera*, have analyzed characters and can name the (Who, What, When Where), have participated in the previous adaptation lesson.

Materials: Copies of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* or *Love in the Time of Cholera*, presentation slides (includes *Florencia en el Amazonas* 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 of Florencia's Act II aria, "Eschúchame (Hear me)."
- **Met Opera on Demand**: Track #15. ACT II: Cristóbal, Cristóbal
03:56 – 05:32
- 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 comes from the opera *Florencia en el Amazonas*.
 - Read/Review opera's short synopsis found in the presentation slides.
- Display aria text and/or aria text 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 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 in presentation slides (rhyme, repetition, meter, alliteration, metaphor, simile, imagery, personification, onomatopoeia, etc.)
 - Ask students to identify poetic devices in the provided examples.
 - Presentation slides include "A Broken Appointment" by Thomas Hardy, "Metamorphosis" by Sylvia Plath, and excerpt of Florencia's Act II aria, "Eschúchame (Hear me)."
- 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 Florencia's Act II aria, "Eschúchame (Hear me)."
- Identify the character who could have written the poem (Florencia herself, the river, etc.), 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.

***Florencia en el Amazonas* (1996)**

Daniel Catán, composer; Marcela Fuentes-Berain, librettist

Florencia en el Amazonas by composer Daniel Catán and librettist Marcela Fuentes-Berain, is inspired by Gabriel García Márquez's works, but it is not directly based on either *Love in the Time of Cholera* or *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Instead, it draws on the magical realism and thematic elements characteristic of García Márquez's writing. It premiered in 1996 at Houston Grand Opera, and was co-commissioned by Los Angeles Opera and Seattle Opera; it holds the distinction of being the first opera in Spanish commissioned by major U.S. opera companies. The work is deeply rooted in the literary tradition of magical realism, which Gabriel García Márquez popularized.

The opera features themes such as love, longing, transformation, and the mystical power of nature, which resonate with both novels, but its story and characters are original. García Márquez served as a loose inspiration, and the librettist, Marcela Fuentes-Berain, who was one of his students, travelled, along with Catán, to the Colombian compound of García Márquez, who gave them ideas for an operatic story.

Short Synopsis

The story follows the legendary diva, Florencia Grimaldi, and her fellow passengers on a boat ride down the Amazon. As they travel through the enchanting rainforest toward their destination—the opera house in Manaus, Brazil—each passenger holds a secret hope for what the journey will bring.

FLORENCIA EN EL AMAZONAS OPERA SYNOPSIS

Daniel Catán, composer; Marcela Fuentes-Berain, librettist

ACT I

The Amazon rainforest, the early 1900s. Passengers aboard the steamboat *El Dorado* are traveling to hear the legendary but intensely private opera singer Florencia Grimaldi sing at the reopening of the theater in Manaus. Riolobo, a mystical character who can assume many forms, introduces the embarking passengers: Paula and Alvaro, a middle-aged couple attempting to rekindle their marriage; Rosalba, a journalist researching a biography on Grimaldi; and Florencia herself, travelling alone and incognito, harboring a burning desire to find her long-lost lover Cristóbal, a butterfly hunter, whose love unlocked her staggering powers of musical expression.

Once en route, Rosalba accidentally drops her research notes overboard. The captain's nephew, Arcadio, manages to rescue them, and the pair becomes aware of a strong mutual attraction. The evening concludes as Paula and Alvaro's attempt at a romantic dinner dissolves into a bitter quarrel. Initially unaware of her identity, the captain tells Florencia of the fate of Cristóbal, who disappeared without trace in the jungle, thus dashing her dearest ambition. As a heated card game brings out the contrasting sexual and hostile tensions between Rosalba and Arcadio and Paula and Alvaro, a violent storm brews outside. Trying to save the ship from being crushed, Alvaro is swept overboard. The captain is knocked unconscious, and despite Arcadio's efforts at the helm, the ship runs aground.

ACT II

Paula mourns the loss of Alvaro, realizing that it was pride—not lack of love—that stood between them. Riolobo appears again mysteriously to return Alvaro to the ship, claiming that Paula's laments saved him from death. Rosalba, distraught that her notebook has been ruined in the storm, talks to the incognito Florencia about her research. During the ensuing discussion, Florencia declares passionately that Grimaldi's gift was a result of her love for Cristóbal. Rosalba realizes that she is talking to her heroine and, hearing her story, decides her own love for Arcadio shouldn't be suppressed. To Rosalba's joy and relief, Arcadio reciprocates her feelings. Paula and Alvaro have also rediscovered their joy and love for each other.

After a long voyage, *El Dorado* reaches Manaus at last; however, the passengers learn that cholera has struck the town. The passengers do not disembark. Florencia laments her loss of Cristóbal, but as she dreams of finding him, her spirit drifts towards his in a mystical transformation.

Synopsis courtesy of the Metropolitan Opera.

Key Scene/Aria in Catán's *Florencia en el Amazonas*

Video excerpts and timestamps are pulled from the Metropolitan Opera on Demand.
Performance Date: Dec. 9, 2023

KEY SCENE/ARIA: Act II, Scene 11: Cristóbal, Cristóbal ("Eschúchame [Hear me]") (Excerpt)

[Met Opera on Demand](#): Track #15. ACT II: Cristóbal, Cristóbal
03:56 – 05:32

A storm has caused the El Dorado to crash. This scene features the aria, "Eschúchame." Following the storm Florencia wonders if she is dead or alive, can Cristóbal hear her? Is he alive?

Libretto Excerpt

FLORENCIA

¿En qué momento era ya tarde?
Cristóbal, Cristóbal
Solo deseaba que escucharas de mis
labios
que tue amor fu eel impulse de mi vida
Sé que estás cerca
Pero no sé si en la vida o en la Muerte
¿Es este tu recuerdo o eres tú?
Por Piedad, Cristóbal
muerto o vivo
¡Eschúchame!

FLORENCIA

When did it become too late?
Cristóbal, Cristóbal?
I only wish that you could hear from my
lips
that your love was the force of my life
I know you are near
But I don't know whether in life or death
Is this a memory or is it you?
Have mercy, Cristóbal
dead or alive
Hear me!

Libretto excerpt courtesy of the Metropolitan Opera.

Poetic Devices used: repetition, personification, imagery, alliteration

RESPONSE POEM EXAMPLE

Are you here, Cristobal?
I feel the air move with your spirit.
The wind moves through the trees, and I can hear it!

Is it really you or only a dream?
My love for you is like the blazing sun
Shining down on both us.
Is it really you or only a dream?

Poetic Devices used: personification, imagery, repetition, simile, alliteration