Enriching the Humanities Through Opera

Title: Responding to Key Scenes
Grade Level: 9-12th
Length: 45 minutes

Literary Work: *Macbeth* (William Shakespeare)
Opera: *Macbeth* (Giuseppe Verdi, composer; Francesco Maria Piave, 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 *Macbeth* (Shakespeare), have analyzed characters and can name the Who, What, When, Where, have participated in the previous adaptation lesson.

Materials: Copies of *Macbeth* (Shakespeare), presentation slides (includes *Macbeth* 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.

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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.

- o 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.
- o 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.
- o 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.
- o 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.
- o 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.
- o 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.
- o 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 response 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.

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<u>Assessment Rubric</u>
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:
<u>Common Core State Standards</u>
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:Cn10.0.T.Ia. Demonstrate how interests, knowledge, and skills relate to personal choice and intent when creating, performing, and responding to music.
MU:Cn11.0.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 the excerpt from Lady Macbeth's Act IV aria, "Una macchia è qui tuttora (There's still a spot here)."
  - PBS LearningMedia™: Macbeth | Act II | The Metropolitan Opera 19:55 − 21:57
  - Have students first listen to the music without video or 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 *Macbeth* (Verdi).
  - Read/Review opera's short synopsis found in the presentation slides.
- Display aria text and aria text translation on board. Have students listen again either following along with the text or watching the 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 excerpts from "my tears ricochet" by Taylor Swift, "The Second Coming" by W.B. Yeats, and

Lady Macbeth's Act IV aria, "Una macchia è qui tuttora (There's still a spot here)."

- 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 Lady Macbeth's Act IV aria, "Una macchia è qui tuttora (There's still a spot here)."
  - Identify the character who could have written the poem (either the Lady in Waiting or the Doctor), 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.
  - Students can review their previously 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 should 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.

Macbeth (1847)
Giuseppe Verdi, composer; Francesco Maria Piave, librettist

Giuseppe Verdi's opera *Macbeth*, inspired by William Shakespeare's play of the same name, was first performed in 1847. It marked one of Verdi's early ventures into the realm of opera based on literary sources, showcasing his growing interest in dramatic storytelling. The opera features a libretto written by Francesco Maria Piave, who adapted Shakespeare's dark themes of ambition, power, and guilt into a lyrical format that suited the operatic style. Verdi's composition captures the psychological depth and intensity of the characters, particularly the tormented Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, making it a pivotal work in his oeuvre and a significant contribution to the opera repertoire.

Short Synopsis

The opera *Macbeth*, based on Shakespeare's play, tells the story of a Scottish nobleman who rises to power through a series of murders to maintain his hold on the throne. After encountering witches who predict his future, Macbeth becomes consumed by ambition and, with the encouragement of his wife, Lady Macbeth, murders King Duncan and seizes the throne. However, his reign is plagued by paranoia, violence, and corruption, leading to his and Lady Macbeth's downfall as they become increasingly tyrannical and consumed by guilt.

MACBETH OPERA SYNOPSIS
Giuseppe Verdi, composer; Francesco Maria Piave, librettist

ACT I *Scotland.*

Macbeth and Banquo, leaders of the Scottish army, meet a group of witches who foretell the future. They address Macbeth as Thane of Cawdor and King of Scotland and tell Banquo that he will be the father of kings. The two men try to learn more, but the witches vanish. Messengers arrive with news that Duncan, the current king of Scotland, has made Macbeth Thane of Cawdor. The first part of the witches' prediction has come true.

In Macbeth's castle, Lady Macbeth reads a letter from her husband telling her of the events that have just transpired. She resolves to follow her ambitions. A servant announces that Duncan will soon arrive at the castle, and when Macbeth enters, she tells him that they must kill the king. Duncan arrives. Macbeth has a vision of a dagger, then leaves to commit the murder. On his return, he tells his wife how the act has frightened him, and she tells him that he needs more courage. They both leave as Banquo enters with Macduff, a nobleman, who discovers the murder. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth pretend to be horrified and join the others in condemning the murder.

ACT II

Macbeth has become king. Duncan's son, Malcolm, is suspected of having killed his father and has fled to England. Worried about the prophecy that Banquo's children will rule, Macbeth and his wife now plan to kill him and his son, Fleance, as well. As Macbeth leaves to prepare the double murder, Lady Macbeth hopes that it will finally make the throne secure.

Outside the castle, assassins wait for Banquo, who appears with his son, warning him of strange forebodings. Banquo is killed, but Fleance escapes.

Lady Macbeth welcomes the court to the banquet hall and sings a drinking song, while Macbeth receives news that Banquo is dead, and his son has escaped. About to take Banquo's seat at the table, Macbeth has a terrifying vision of the dead man accusing him. His wife is unable to calm her unsettled husband, and the courtiers wonder about the king's strange behavior. Macduff vows to leave the country, which is now ruled by criminals.

ACT III

The witches gather again, and Macbeth visits them, demanding more prophecies. Apparitions warn him to beware of Macduff and assure him that "no man of woman born" can harm him, and that he will be invincible until Birnam Wood marches on his castle. In another vision, he sees a procession of future kings, followed by Banquo.

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Horrified, Macbeth collapses. The witches disappear and his wife finds him. They resolve to kill Macduff and his family.

ACT IV

On the Scottish border, Macduff has joined the refugees. His wife and children have been killed. Malcolm appears with British troops and leads them to invade Scotland.

Lady Macbeth is sleepwalking, haunted by the horrors of what she and her husband have done.

Macbeth awaits the arrival of his enemies and realizes that he will never live to a peaceful old age. Messengers bring news that Lady Macbeth has died, and that Birnam Wood appears to be moving. English soldiers appear, camouflaged with its branches. Macduff confronts Macbeth and tells him that he was not born naturally but had a Caesarean birth. He kills Macbeth and proclaims Malcolm king of Scotland.

Synopsis courtesy of the Metropolitan Opera.

Key Scene/Aria in Verdi's *Macbeth*

Video excerpts and timestamps are pulled from the Metropolitan Opera on Demand and
PBS LearningMedia™. Performance Date: Oct. 11, 2014

**KEY SCENE/ARIA: Act IV, Scene 4: "Una macchia è qui tuttora (There's still a spot
here)" (Excerpt)**

Met Opera on Demand: Track #33. ACT IV: Una macchia è qui tuttora
00:00 – 02:02

OR

PBS LearningMedia™: Macbeth | Act IV | The Metropolitan Opera
19:55 – 21:57

Lady Macbeth, tormented by guilt, sleepwalks, haunted by the crimes she and her
husband have committed.

Libretto Excerpt

LADY MACBETH
Una macchia è qui tuttora.
Via, ti dico, o maledetta!
Una, Due, gli è questa l'ora!
Tremi tu? non osi entrar?
Un guerrier così codardo?
Oh vergogna! orsù, t'affretta!
Chi poteva in quel vegiardo
Tanto sangue immaginar?

LADY MACBETH
There's still a spot here.
Away, I tell you, curse you!
One, two, it is time!
Are you shaking? Don't you dare go in?
A soldier and so cowardly?
Shame! Come on, hurry!
Who would have thought that there would
be so much blood in that old man?

Libretto excerpt courtesy of Opera Folio.

Poetic Devices used: metaphor, personification, imagery, repetition

RESPONSE POEM EXAMPLE

Lady Macbeth, thy words do echo still,
In darkest halls, where shadows chill and thrill.
A stain of guilt upon thy hand doth lie,
A blemish on thy soul, that will not die.

Poetic devices used: rhyme, symbolism, metaphor, alliteration, imagery,
personification.

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