

Enriching the Humanities Through Opera

Script for Lesson: Responding to Key Scenes

Grade Level: 9-12th

Length: 45 minutes

Literary Work: *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (Malcolm X and Alex Haley)

Opera: *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X* (Anthony Davis, composer; Thulani Davis, librettist)

Slide 1:

Today we're going to explore the powerful interplay between poetry and music.

Slide 2:

Our inquiry question is: "How can poetry and music enhance a key scene in a story?"
By the end of the lesson, we will be able to: (List off objectives from slide.)

Slide 3 or 4: **Choose either Option 1 or Option 2.**

To kick things off, we're going to listen to an excerpt of an aria (a self-contained piece for solo voice, like a song) from an opera. As you listen, take note of the emotions the music makes you feel.

Option 1: Act I, Scene 3: "You want the story, but you don't want to know"

OR

Option 2: Act III, Scene 2: "When a man is lost"

00:00 – 01:28

Listen to music without showing video.

Slide 5:

Alright, who would like to share what emotions or feelings they observed while listening?

Provide students space to share their thoughts.

(Add the answers to the slide to create an emotion vocabulary "toolbox".)

Slide 6:

This aria is from the opera *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X*.

Read/review brief opera synopsis on slide.

Slide 7 or 8: *Either Option 1 or Option 2.*

Now let's look at the text of the aria we just heard. I want you to listen again while following along with the words. This time, jot down any new ideas that come to you or anything that has changed for you.

(Either keep the text up on this slide or show the video excerpt.)

Listen to music again, encouraging students to note new insights.

Slide 9:

Now that you've had a second listen with the text, let's discuss:

Questions on slide:

- How does viewing the text change your understanding?
- Does knowing the character(s) singing change your understanding?
- How does the text and music add to your understanding of the scene?

Provide students space to share their thoughts.

Slide 10:

Music adds depth to the poetry and vice versa. As we dig deeper, let's talk about poetic devices. These techniques are used not only by poets, but by songwriters and librettists alike to enhance their text. Let's review some together.

Define the list of poetic devices as a class, either using the provided definitions in lesson plan/handout or using prior knowledge.

Slide 11:

Who can point out the specific locations of the poetic devices in the following examples?

Provide students space to answer question.

Slide 12:

And how about here?

Provide students space to answer question.

Slide 13: *Option 1*

Now let's go back to Malcolm X's aria. What poetic devices can you find here?

Provide students space to answer question.

Poetic Devices used: repetition, metaphor, imagery, rhyme

How does using poetic devices enhance the storytelling and emotions particularly in this scene?

Provide students space to share their thoughts.

And in general?

Provide students space to share their thoughts.

Slide 14: Option 2

Now let's go back to Betty's aria. What poetic devices can you find here?

Provide students space to answer question.

Poetic Devices used: *imagery, symbolism, metaphor, alliteration*

How does using poetic devices enhance the storytelling and emotions particularly in this scene?

Provide students space to share their thoughts.

And in general?

Provide students space to share their thoughts.

Slide: 15:

Now, let's put our knowledge to practice. We will write a response poem based on (students' choice of [Option 1: Malcolm X's aria or Option 2: Betty's aria], or their chosen key scene from the Exploring Story Adaptation lesson). We will choose one character in the scene and write a poem from their point of view in response to the scene's action and/or what is being communicated. The minimum length is four lines, and you must include at least two poetic devices.

****Students may use their laptops/tablets to access the libretto excerpts of the key scenes on the OPERA America website. Print outs of the libretto excerpts can be distributed as well.**

Slide 16: Option 1

Here's an example of a response poem.

Read aloud, discuss meaning and identify the poetic devices used.

Poetic Devices used: *personification, alliteration, rhyme*

From whose point of view could this be written?

Provide students space to answer question. (Malcolm X's father, Earl)

Slide 17: Option 2

Here's an example of a response poem.

Read aloud, discuss meaning and identify the poetic devices used.

Poetic Devices used: *metaphor, alliteration, rhyme*

From whose point of view could this be written?

Provide students space to answer question. (Malcolm X)

Write as if you are one of the characters in the scene, describing the emotions the character is feeling and their perspective on the action taking place.

What questions do you have?

Take time to answer any questions students may have.

We will work independently for this activity. You will be given 12 minutes to write your response poems. We will then have time to present our poems so if you finish early, take time to practice speaking it, bringing out the musicality and emotion in your poems through rhythm and intonation.

(Return to Slide 15. Have students write their poems on a separate piece of paper. Provide them with the poetic devices definitions handout, if needed. Walk around the classroom, offering assistance as students work. Provide a 5-minute, 2-minute, and 1-minute warning.)

Slide 18:

Alright, who would like to share their poem? Remember, this is a chance to express yourself creatively!

Students volunteer to present/perform their poems. Encourage dynamic readings.

Slide 19:

Thank you to those who shared their response poems. How does poetry and music enhance the scene?

Provide students space to share their thoughts.

What did you learn from viewing and presenting our response poems?

Allow a moment for reflection, then invite students to share their thoughts.

Slide 20:

Great work today!

****If planning to continue with the Production Design Adaptation lesson (follow up to the Exploring Story Adaptation lesson), add an announcement about delving into the opera and adaptation more next class.**