

Enriching the Humanities Through Opera

Script for Lesson: Production Design Adaptation

Grade Level: 9-12th

Length: 45 minutes

Literary Work: *The Marriage of Figaro (La Folle Journée, Ou Le Mariage de Figaro)*
(Pierre Beaumarchais)

Opera: *Le nozze di Figaro* (W.A. Mozart, composer; Lorenzo Da Ponte, librettist)

Slide 1:

Today, we're diving into visual storytelling as we continue our exploration of adaptation and the opera *Le nozze di Figaro (Leh NOHT-tseh dee FEE-gah-roh)*.

Slide 2:

Our inquiry is: "How does production and visual design aid in storytelling?" By the end of the lesson, we will be able to: (List off objectives from slide.)

Slide 3:

To start, we're going to listen to the overture/an important musical moment of [title of opera] (pronunciation). I want you to jot down anything that comes to mind while you listen — colors, moods, textures, spaces you imagine. For example, does the music make you visualize the color green, perhaps a vibrant green field or a dark, mysterious forest? Or the smell of fresh cut grass and the feel of grass under your feet.

Le nozze di Figaro – Overture Excerpt

00:57 – 03:14

Listen to music.

Who would like to share what came to mind?

Provide students space to share their thoughts.

Think about how these thoughts relate to storytelling. How does music evoke strong visuals and feelings?

Provide students space to share their thoughts.

Slides 4-10: Review short opera synopsis and key scenes – as much or as little as needed.

Slides 5-6: Key Scene #1

Let's review this key scene. the Countess reveals her deep longing for the love of her husband, Count Almaviva, who has become distant and unfaithful. It marks a pivotal moment in the opera, unveiling the emotional complexity of the Countess. This shift adds a layer of poignancy and vulnerability to the otherwise comedic atmosphere, reminding us that, beneath the playful schemes and mischief, genuine emotions and struggles are at play. This contrast enriches the narrative, blending comedy with heartfelt sincerity.

Met Opera on Demand: Track #16. ACT II: Porgi, amor, qualche ristoro
01:04 – 04:01

OR

Act II, Scene 1: Porgi, amor, qualche ristoro
48:08 – 51:26

Slides 7-8: Key Scene #2

Let's reexamine this key scene. Figaro stands trial for allegedly breaking a marriage contract with Marcellina, but the tension takes an unexpected turn when a birthmark reveals that Figaro is, in fact, Marcellina's long-lost son, with Bartolo as his father. What begins as a legal dispute quickly transforms into a joyful family reunion. Meanwhile, Susanna enters, mistakenly believing Figaro has betrayed her when she sees him in an embrace with Marcellina, only to discover the truth and share in the happiness. This moment is a brilliant mix of humor, surprise, and emotional resolution, perfectly illustrating the opera's seamless blend of comedy and deeper emotional stakes.

Met Opera on Demand: Track #36. ACT III: Riconosci in questo amplesso — Eccovi — lo vi dico
00:48 – 06:27

OR

Act II, Scene 5: Riconosci in questo amplesso
2:01:22 – 2:06:57

Slides 9-10: Key Scene #3

Let's go over this key scene. After a whirlwind of disguises, mistaken identities, and emotional turmoil, the truth is finally revealed. The Count, realizing his errors, is humbled, and the Countess, whose dignity and grace have been central throughout, forgives him. The various romantic entanglements are untangled, and Figaro and Susanna's long-awaited marriage is celebrated. The opera concludes on a note of reconciliation and joy, with the characters coming together in a triumphant moment of

harmony. A perfect blend of comedy, redemption, and emotional resolution, leaving the audience with a sense of fulfillment and delight.

Met Opera on Demand: Track #47. ACT IV: Gente, gente, all'armi — Questo giorno di tormenti

00:00 – 05:24

OR

Act IV, Finale: Gente, gente, all'armi, all'armi!... Questo giorno di tormenti

2:59:50 – 3:05:28

Slides 11-17:

As we just explored, artistic processes often start with our own experiences and perspectives. Let's explore how this translates into Production Design, shaping the visual world of an opera. This important process enhances storytelling and communicates mood.

Briefly explain the definitions of set design, costume design, props, lighting design, projection design, and hair/makeup design.

Together, these elements create an immersive experience for the audience, helping them feel connected to the story.

Slide 18:

Let's look at a couple of different opera productions. Each creative team brings their own unique interpretation to the story. What do you notice?

Provide students space to share their thoughts.

Pay attention to the details — along with the set, consider the costumes and props. What are the ways they play into our understanding?

Provide students space to share their thoughts.

Slide 19:

Designers consider the fundamental elements of color, line, shape, texture, form, space, value, and pattern, etc. to communicate their visions.

Briefly define/review the elements of design found on the slide.

Slide 20:

Now let's look at the elements of design highlighted in these productions. What do you notice? How does the use of the element enhance the story?

Analyze the examples on the slide, using the text to direct and enhance the discussion.

Slide 21:

I want us to think about how we can incorporate at least three elements of design into the opera pitch adaptations we created. As we dive into creating designs for our adaptations, remember, we'll be pulling inspiration from the literary work, opera and possibly other sources, but when we do so, we need to keep intellectual property laws and plagiarism in mind – give credit where it is due.

What questions do you have?

Take time to answer any questions students may have.

Slide 22: Here are two examples of different designs for the opera's finale. Notice the color palette as well as the use of line, space, shapes, textures, patterns, etc. in the set and costumes, the lighting, use of props, and how it all works together, establishing time period and enhancing the mood, tone, and overall atmosphere of the production.

Discuss examples on the slide.

Slide 23:

Here are some ways to turn your adaptation pitches into set and costume designs.

Analyze the examples on the slide, using the image captions to direct and enhance the discussion.

The visual components of storytelling are just as powerful as the words and music.

Slide 24:

We will be working in our groups to create set and costume designs based on your opera pitches. Each group will receive a Production Design Questionnaire to fill out that will help guide the process and reasoning behind your choices. We will have 20 minutes to complete the designs and questionnaire.

Take time to answer any questions students may have.

(Pass out each group's opera adaptation pitch worksheets as well as 1 set design, and 1 costume design worksheet per group. Provide them with the production design definitions handout and elements of design definitions handout, if needed.)

****Students may use the set design and costume design worksheets to sketch out ideas or create collages. If a digital approach is preferred, students may use a school district approved AI image creator to craft designs and/or mood/concept boards.**

(Walk around the classroom, offering assistance as students work. Provide a 10-minute, 5-minute, and 2-minute warning).

Slide 25:

Who is ready to share their designs? Groups, please use the questionnaire as a guideline when presenting your set and costume design sketches.

Facilitate the sharing process, encouraging respectful listening and feedback among students.

Slide 26:

As we wrap up, I want us to reflect on today's experience and this entire adaptation process. Consider how you refined your opera adaptation pitches through visual design. What did you learn about storytelling? How has this process shifted your perspective on storytelling and your approach to developing ideas?

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

Slide 27:

Thank you for your wonderful contributions today and throughout this process!