

Enriching the Humanities Through Opera

Script for Lesson: Production Design Adaptation

Grade Level: 9-12th

Length: 45 minutes

Literary Work: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (William Shakespeare)

Opera: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Benjamin Britten, composer; Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears, librettists)

Slide 1:

Today, we're diving into visual storytelling as we continue our exploration of adaptation and the opera *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

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 introduction of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. 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.

Act I: Introduction – "Over hill, over dale"

00:04 – 1:35

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. Puck's transformation of Bottom's head into a donkey's is both funny and significant, leading to a comedic encounter with Tytania, the fairy queen.

Act II, Scene 1: Puck "Makes an ass" of Bottom
06:19 – 8:50

Slides 7-8: Key Scene #2

Let's reexamine this key scene. After the weddings of Theseus, Hippolyta, and the lovers, the mechanicals present their play-within-a-play. The over-the-top emotions are deliberately humorous, mocking melodramatic tales of tragic romance such as *Romeo and Juliet*, and emphasizing how the main story steers clear of such a conclusion.

Act III, Scene 2: Pyramus and Thisbe
00:06 – 2:01

Slides 9-10: Key Scene #3

Let's go over this key scene. The storylines wrap up with a playful sense of harmony. Puck's closing address to the audience cleverly breaks the "fourth wall," blurring the line between performance and reality as the character cheekily acknowledges the theatrical nature of the events.

Act III, Finale & Puck's Epilogue
0:03 – 3:02

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 three examples of different designs for Act II, Scene 1: Puck “makes an ass” of Bottom. 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 examples of several different designs for Bottom's donkey head. Notice the details in Bottom's transformation and how some designs go beyond, such as by adding a tail and hooves.

Discuss examples on the slide.

Slide 24:

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 25:

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 26:

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 27:

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 28:

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