

# Exploring Story Adaptation

Enriching the Humanities Through Opera

**OPERA  
AMERICA**

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# ***What is story adaptation and how is it relevant to opera?***

## **Today's Objectives:**

- Analyze an opera synopsis based on a literary work.
- Compare a literary work with the opera adaptation synopsis.
- Identify elements of adaptation across multiple versions of the same key scene present in the literary source and opera.
- Collaboratively brainstorm a pitch for an opera adaptation of the literary work.



**Write down the first word that comes to mind.**

Opera

Emile Griffith

Adaptation



# Timeline of Emile Griffith's Life

As a class, complete timeline of major events in Emile Griffith's life.



Emile Griffith was born  
in St. Thomas, U.S.  
Virgin Islands in 1938.

# ***Champion* Synopsis**

The powerful and deeply personal story of Emile Griffith, a six-time world champion boxer, whose life was shaped by triumph and tragedy. Griffith rose from a hat factory worker to a boxing legend, culminating in his infamous 1962 fight with Benny "Kid" Paret, which resulted in Paret's death. Haunted by this event and grappling with his identity, Griffith seeks forgiveness and reconciliation in his later years.

# Talk & Turn

Compare the opera synopsis with the timeline created and *Knock Out!*.

- What events did the librettist choose to include and what did they leave out?
- Is there a difference in point of view? In historical context? In narrative structure?
- What else did you notice?

# Key Scene #1: Act I, Scene 8: Hey, Mr. Albert

Emile relocates to New York from the U.S. Virgin Islands in search of his mother, Emelda. When he finally finds her. Determined to help Emile find work, she introduces him to Howie Albert, a hat manufacturer. Howie quickly notices Emile's athletic build and, seeing potential, decides to train him as a boxer.

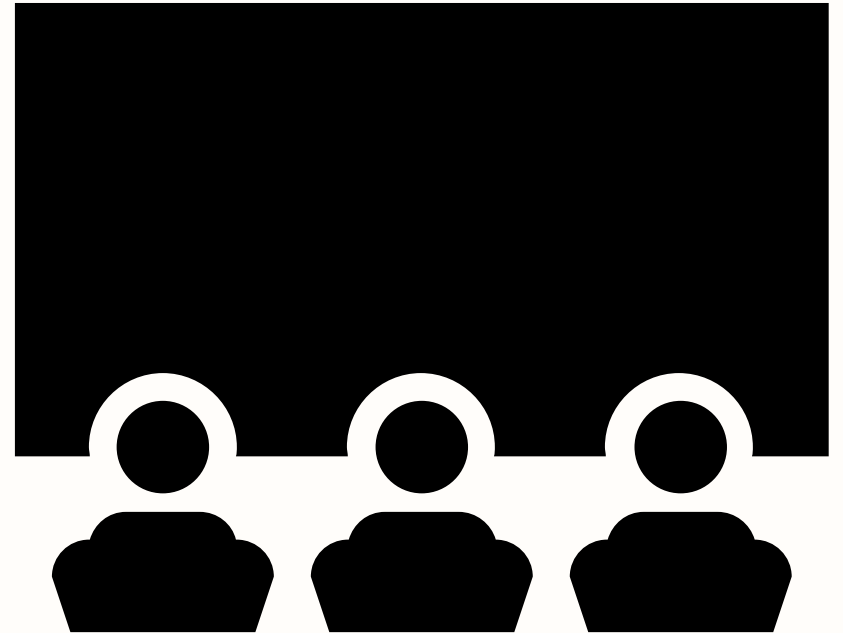


*Champion*, Lyric Opera of Chicago (photo: Michael Brosilow)

# Key Scene #1 continued

Met Opera on Demand: Track #12. ACT I: Hey Mr. Albert

00:00 – 3:43





# Key Scene #2: Act I, Scene 22-23: Don't listen, Emile. Don't think–In my head it happens fast

During the weigh-in, Benny “Kid” Paret taunts Emile about his sexual orientation, provoking tension between the two fighters. Once in the ring, Paret continues to antagonize Emile. In a burst of fury, further encouraged by Howie’s coaching, Emile delivers seventeen blows in less than seven seconds, knocking Paret into a coma.

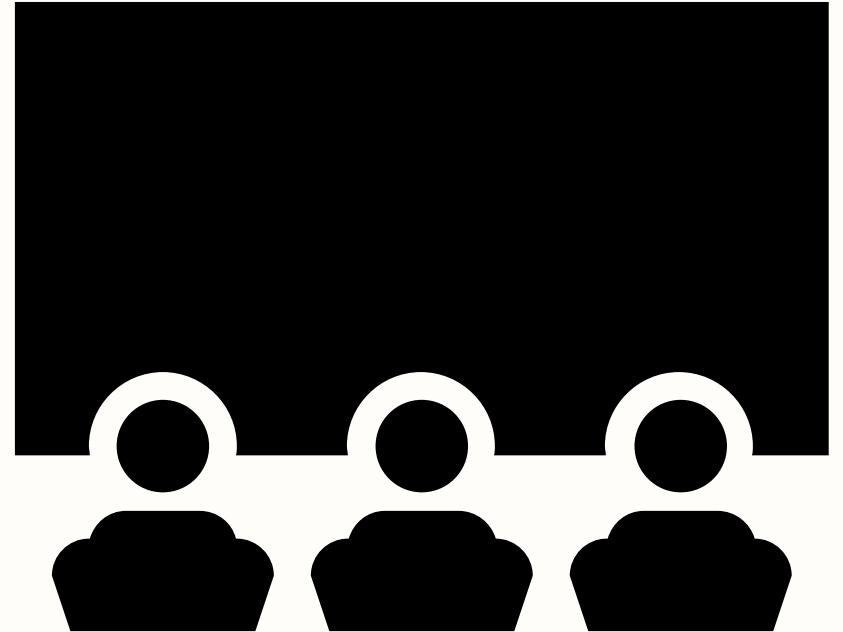


*Champion*, Lyric Opera of Chicago (photo: Michael Brosilow)

# Key Scene #2 continued

Met Opera on Demand: Track #27. ACT I: Don't listen, Emile. Don't think—In my head it happens fast

04:56 – 07:03



# Key Scene #3: Act II, Scene 20: What is it you want from me? (I'm sorry)



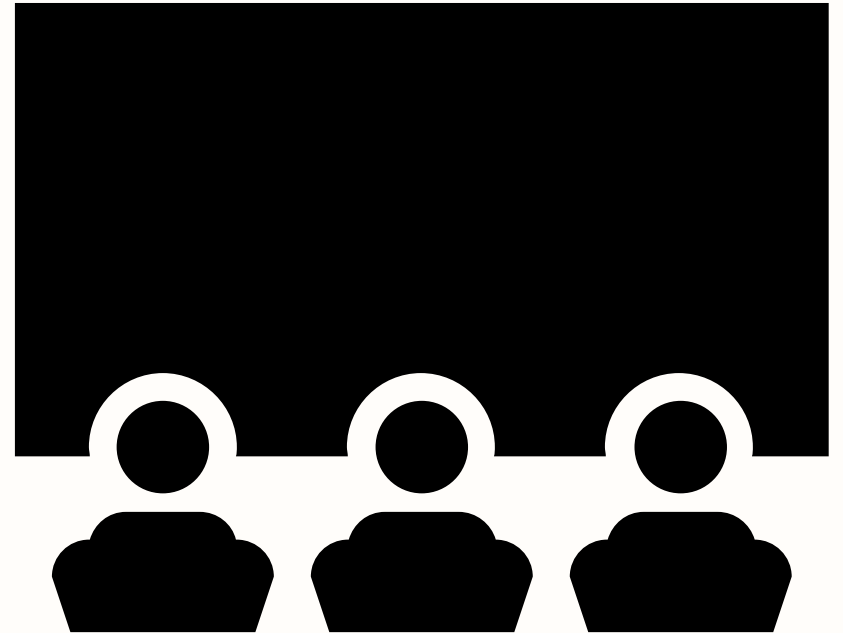
*Champion*, Lyric Opera of Chicago (photo: Michael Brosilow)

Emile, suffering from brain trauma from his boxing career and haunted by his past, faces Benny Paret Jr. seeking forgiveness for the fatal fight that took the now young man's father.

# Key Scene #3 continued

Met Opera on Demand: Track #47. ACT II: What is it you want from me?

00:00 – 03:02



# **Why do we adapt stories?**

# Adaptation Guidelines

Adapting the Who, What, When, and Where.

- . **Who:** character/character identity

*Note: character identity can be adapted, but characters may not be eliminated or added.*

- . **What:** key scene, action in the story - what is happening?
- . **When:** time period, time of day, year, etc.
- . **Where:** location and setting

# Adaptation Pitch



**Who** (characters in the scene):

**What** (scene action):

**When** (time period, time of year/day):

**Where** (location/setting):

Why did you choose to adapt the opera this way?

How will these changes affect the rest of the story?

**Present** 



# Reflection

Share thoughts on the story adaptation pitch process.

How did your understanding of the story change as you adapted it?

Were there any new insights or perspectives that emerged?



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