

Enriching the Humanities Through Opera

Script for Lesson: Exploring Story Adaptation

Grade Level: 9-12th

Length: 45 minutes

Literary Work: The Barber of Seville (Le Barbier de Séville, Ou la Précaution inutile)
(Pierre Beaumarchais)

Opera: Il barbiere di Siviglia (Gioachino Rossini, composer; Cesare Sterbini, librettist)

Slide 1:

Today, we're going to explore the concept of story adaptation.

Slide 2:

Our inquiry question is: "What is story adaptation and how is it relevant to opera?" By the end of the lesson, we will be able to: (List off objectives from slide.)

Slide 3:

We are going to begin with a word association exercise. Write down the first word that comes to mind for these words... (opera, *The Barber of Seville*, adaptation).

(Reveal each word independently to give students a chance to write down/come up with their answers.)

****Instead of having students write down their answers, instructor could create a live word cloud such as with *Mentimeter*. Students can add their responses via their phones/computers/tablets (repeated words will increase in size.**

What comes to mind when you hear the word "opera"?

Provide students space to share their thoughts.

Those are some great responses! It seems like many of you think of (examples: music, singing, and performance, etc. ... that's all part of opera!) Opera is a dramatic work set to music, with singers performing entire roles accompanied by an orchestra. It typically includes arias, duets, and ensembles, and is known for its elaborate costumes, sets, and vocal prowess. Has anyone seen an opera before?

What words did we associate with *The Barber of Seville*?

Provide students space to share their thoughts. (Possible responses: comedy, energetic, fast-paced, clever, mischief, etc.)

Finally, what about "adaptation"? What does that mean to you?

Provide students space to share their thoughts.

That's a great start! Adaptation is when a creative work, such as a film, television show, play, opera, musical, or even book, is based on an existing story, like a novel or short story. It's when we take an idea and make changes to fit it into a new medium or vision.

Slide 4:

Let's review the story arc of our literary work. Can anyone remind us of the exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution of this story?

Review the story arc as a class.

Exposition: *The Count observes Rosina from a distance and decides to pursue her, knowing he must act discreetly due to Dr. Bartolo's strict oversight.*

Rising Action: *The Count disguises himself as "Lindoro," a poor student, to approach Rosina with the help of Figaro, without revealing his noble status.*

Climax: *During the music lesson, Dr. Bartolo returns unexpectedly, leading to a frantic moment where the Count must reveal his true identity to Rosina.*

Falling Action: *Figaro and the Count orchestrate a clever plan to marry Rosina in secret while evading Dr. Bartolo's watchful eye.*

Resolution: *The Count and Rosina successfully marry, celebrating their love and freedom from Dr. Bartolo's constraints. Dr. Bartolo begrudgingly accepts the outcome.*

Slide 5:

Great! Now we are going to read through the synopsis of the Italian opera *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (eel bar-BYEH-reh dee see-VEEL-ya), an adaptation of Beaumarchais's play.

(Pass out opera synopsis handout.)

Read through the synopsis as a class.

Slide 6:

I would like for us to compare the story structure of the opera with the original literary work. Turn and talk with your neighbor and discuss what are some differences and similarities you noticed?

Questions on slide:

- Is the setting/time period the same for both the opera and literary work?
- Is there a difference in point of view? In historical context? In narrative structure?
- What else did you notice?

Give students a couple of minutes to discuss the questions in pairs or small groups.

Would anyone like to share what they discussed?

Provide students space to share their thoughts.

We are now going to delve deeper into this opera adaptation of *The Barber of Seville*.

Slides 7-12: Key Scenes: choose which key scene to introduce to the class.

Slide 7: Key Scene #1

Let's look at this key scene. Figaro, the town's barber and jack-of-all-trades, sings proudly of his busy and charmed life, eventually catching the attention of Count Almaviva, who seeks his help. The aria (a self-contained piece for solo voice, like a song) in this scene, titled "*Largo al factotum*," is considered one of the most challenging baritone arias to perform.

Discuss any prominent and notable features in the image, including the identification of characters as well as any significant details that highlight their interactions or setting.

Slide 8: Key Scene #1

Here is an excerpt from that scene. As we watch, notice how any differences in the scene compared with the original literary work.

(Watch excerpt.)

*Met Opera on Demand: Track #8. ACT I: Largo al factotum & Track # 9. ACT I: Ah, ah! Che bella vita!
#8. 02:37 – 05:02 into #9. 00:00 – 00:43*

OR

*Act I, Scene 2: Largo al factotum della città
20:39 – 23:32*

What did you notice?

Provide students space to share their thoughts.

Slide 9: Key Scene #2

Let's analyze this key scene. Rosina writes to Count Almaviva, whom she knows as Lindoro, but as Dr. Bartolo grows suspicious and Basilio suggests spreading false rumors about the Count, Figaro overhears, warns Rosina, and promises to deliver her note to Lindoro to outsmart Bartolo.

Discuss any prominent and notable features in the image, including the identification of characters as well as any significant details that highlight their interactions or setting.

Slide 10: Key Scene #2

Here is an excerpt from that scene. As we watch, notice how any differences in the scene compared with the original literary work.

(Watch excerpt.)

*Met Opera on Demand: Track #17. ACT I: Dunque io son. Tu non m'inganni?
00:00 – 05:09*

OR

*Act I: Dunque io son... tu non m'inganni?
1:01:23 – 1:06:32*

What did you notice?

Provide students space to share their thoughts.

Slide 11: Key Scene #3

Let's examine this key scene. Disguised as Don Alonso, Count Almaviva gives Rosina a singing lesson under the pretense of being Don Basilio's student, allowing them a private moment despite the presence of her suspicious guardian, Bartolo, who is repeatedly outwitted.

Discuss any prominent and notable features in the image, including the identification of characters as well as any significant details that highlight their interactions or setting.

Slide 12: Key Scene #3

Here is an excerpt from that scene. As we watch, notice how any differences in the scene compared with the original literary work.

(Watch excerpt.)

*Met Opera on Demand: Track #27. ACT II: Contro un cor che accende amore
00:00 – 05:22*

OR

*Act II: Contro un cor che accende amore
1:42:35 – 1:50:10*

What did you notice?

Provide students space to share their thoughts.

Slide 13:

Why do we adapt stories?

Provide students space to share their thoughts.

How does storytelling and adaptation add relevance for an audience?

Provide students space to share their thoughts.

Gioachino Rossini composed *Il barbiere di Siviglia* in 1816, adapting Pierre Beaumarchais' 1775 play *Le Barbier de Séville*. Remarkably, Rossini completed the opera in under three weeks, bringing vibrant energy to the comedic story of Figaro. Librettist (writer of the text) Cesare Sterbini remained faithful to the humor and wit of Beaumarchais' original, streamlining the text for the operatic form while emphasizing the absurd and fast-paced nature of the plot. Despite a challenging premiere, the opera quickly became a beloved classic, with Rossini's lively music and Sterbini's clever wording, the opera adaptation transforms the play into another timeless comedic masterpiece.

Slide 14:

To further our understanding of the adaptation process, we will create an adaptation pitch for one of the three chosen key scenes from the opera. Before we do, let's look at the adaptation guidelines. We will focus on the Who, What, When, and Where in the scene. When we say, "who," we mean the characters in the scene, "what" means the action in the scene, "when" means the time period and time of day and/or year, and "where" is the location and setting. Please note that the character identity can be adapted, but characters may not be eliminated or added to the scene.

Our adaptation pitches are to be intentional, thoughtful and show our knowledge of the original literary work.

What questions do you have?

Take time to answer any questions students may have.

Slide 15:

Using the background knowledge of the story and our new understanding of the opera, let's do a quick adaptation pitch for the key scene we just looked at. How could we adapt the "who?"

(Add student suggestions to the slide.)

The action? The “what?”

(Add student suggestions to the slide.)

The “when?”

(Add student suggestions to the slide.)

The “why?”

(Add student suggestions to the slide.)

Please note that each decision you make will have a ripple-like effect on the overall story.

Are there any other questions?

Take time to answer any questions students may have.

****Students can either work in groups selected by the instructor or students choose their own groups – number of students per group depends on class size. Students can either adapt the same key scene or choose a different key scene provided using their laptops/tablets. Libretto excerpts of the key scenes can be accessed on the OPERA America website. Print outs of the libretto excerpts can be distributed as well.**

We are now going to break out into groups and choose one of the three key scenes from the opera and brainstorm an adaptation pitch. You may use your laptop/tablet to find the additional key scenes provided in the slides. You will have 10 minutes to create your opera adaptation pitches and answer the questions. Each group will be given a worksheet with the same questions on the slide to complete and help guide the process. Please answer the last two questions using complete sentences.

(Return to Slide 14. Have students break out into groups by preferred method. Pass out the opera adaptation pitch worksheets, 1 per group, or have students answer the questions on a separate piece of paper [stay on Slide 15]. Students work in groups for 10 minutes.)

Begin!

(Walk around the classroom, offering assistance as students work. Provide a 5-minute, 2-minute, and 1-minute warning.)

Slide 16:

Now it's time to share our ideas! Each group will present their opera adaptation pitch to the class. Remember to explain your creative decisions and rationale.

Groups take turns presenting their opera adaptation pitches.

Slide 17:

Thank you for sharing! How did your understanding of the story change as you adapted it?

Provide students space to share their thoughts.

Have any new insights or perspectives emerged?

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

Slide 18:

Thank you all for your work today!

****If planning to continue with Responding to Key Scenes lesson, add an announcement about exploring the opera more next class.**