

## Enriching the Humanities Through Opera

**Title:** Responding to Key Scenes

**Grade Level:** 9-12<sup>th</sup>

**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)

**Inquiry Question:** How can poetry and music enhance a key scene in a story?

**Lesson Focus:** This lesson will focus on responding to the context in a key scene or turning point in the opera by devising a poem based on a character's emotions in that moment.

**Prior Knowledge:** Students have read *The Barber of Seville (Le Barbier de Séville, Ou la Précaution inutile)*, have analyzed characters and can name the (Who, What, When, Where), have participated in the previous adaptation lesson.

**Materials:** Copies of *The Barber of Seville (Le Barbier de Séville, Ou la Précaution inutile)*, presentation slides (includes *Il barbiere di Siviglia* short opera synopsis with video examples and libretto excerpts), poetic devices definitions handout, libretto excerpts of key scenes, interactive board, paper, and pens/pencils.

**Key Vocabulary:** Aria, poetic devices (rhyme, repetition, meter, alliteration, metaphor, simile, imagery, personification, onomatopoeia, etc.)

### Definitions

- **Aria:** A self-contained piece for solo voice typically found in opera, oratorio, and cantata. It typically showcases the vocal abilities of the singer and often serves as a moment of introspection or emotional expression for the character.
- **Poetic Devices:** Refers to techniques and tools used by poets to create a desired effect in their writing. These devices include features such as rhyme, meter, metaphor, simile, alliteration, imagery, and symbolism, among others. Each device helps to enhance the meaning, emotions, or aesthetics of a poem.
  - **Rhyme:** Where words have similar sounds, usually at the end of the word, creating a harmonious and pleasing effect in poetry or song lyrics.
  - **Symbolism:** The use of symbols to represent ideas or qualities, often conveying deeper meanings or emotions beyond literal interpretation. Symbols can be objects, images, words, or gestures that carry symbolic significance and are used to enhance the meaning of a text, artwork, or communication.

**Repetition:** Refers to the deliberate use of the same word, phrase, line, or stanza multiple times within a poem. This technique helps emphasize certain ideas or themes, create rhythm, and establish a sense of unity or structure.

- **Meter:** Refers to the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a line of verse. It provides a rhythmic structure and helps to create a sense of musicality in the poem. Different poetic forms and styles may have varying meters, such as iambic pentameter or trochaic tetrameter.
- **Alliteration:** The repetition of the same sound at the beginning of neighboring words in a sentence or phrase. It is often used in poetry, literature, and advertising to create a rhythm or musical effect.
- **Metaphor:** A figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable to imply a resemblance, typically for rhetorical or expressive effect.
- **Simile:** A figure of speech in which two things are compared using "like" or "as" to show similarities between them. It is used to make descriptions more vivid and engaging by creating a clear image in the reader's mind.
- **Imagery:** Refers to the use of descriptive language that appeals to the senses, creating vivid mental images for the reader or listener. This technique helps to evoke emotions, set the mood, and enhance the overall meaning.
- **Personification:** Refers to the use of human characteristics or qualities attributed to animals, objects, or abstract concepts. This technique is used to give non-human entities human-like traits to create vivid imagery or convey deeper meanings.
- **Onomatopoeia:** A word that phonetically imitates, resembles or suggests the sound that it describes, such as "buzz," "meow," or "splash." It is a figure of speech that uses words to mimic the sounds of the real world, creating a sensory experience for the reader or listener.

**Objective(s):** At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify characters' emotions and responses in a key scene.
- Identify poetic devices found in presented examples.
- Create a poem, at least four lines in length, using two poetic devices to represent a character's response to a key scene in the work.
- Demonstrate their understanding of their chosen key scene through their poems.

**Assessment:** Evaluate students' understanding of their chosen key scene and character from their writing of a minimum of four-line poems incorporating at least two poetic devices.

## Assessment Rubric

4: The student's poem is highly creative, effectively uses at least two poetic devices, and is well-structured with descriptive language demonstrating understanding of character's emotions and response to action in key scene.

3: The student's poem is moderately creative, uses at least two poetic devices, and is mostly well-structured with some understanding of character's emotions and response to action in key scene.

2: The student's poem lacks creativity, struggles to incorporate poetic devices, and is poorly structured with minimal understanding of character's emotions and response to action in key scene.

1: The student's poem lacks creativity, fails to use poetic devices, and is poorly structured with a significant lack of understanding of character's emotions and response to action in key scene.

## **Learning Standards:**

### Common Core State Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5: Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on other's ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3: Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3: Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.5: Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.6: Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).

## National Core Arts Standards

MU:Cn10.o.T.Ia. Demonstrate how interests, knowledge, and skills relate to personal choice and intent when creating, performing, and responding to music.

MU:Cn11.o.T.Ia. Demonstrate understanding of relationships between music and the other arts, other disciplines, varied contexts, and daily life.

TH:Cr2-II.a. Refine a dramatic concept to demonstrate a critical understanding of historical and cultural influences of original ideas applied to a drama/theatre work.

TH:Pr4.1.I.a. Examine how character relationships assist in telling the story of a drama/theatre work.

TH:Pr4.1.I.b. Shape character choices using given circumstances in a drama/theatre work.

TH:Re7.1.I.a. Respond to what is seen, felt, and heard in a drama/theatre work to develop criteria for artistic choices.

### **Procedure:**

Introduction/Hook (5 minutes):

- Begin with a listening activity of Count Almaviva’s Act I aria, “Ecco ridente in cielo (Lo, in the smiling sky).”
  - [Act I, Scene 1: Ecco ridente in cielo \(Lo, in the smiling sky\)](#)  
10:55 – 14:48
  - Have students first listen to the music without text displayed on board and take notes of the emotions being expressed in the music.
    - Discuss findings and make a list of answers to create an emotion vocabulary “toolbox.”

Main Narrative/Sequence (20 minutes):

- Explain that this aria comes from the opera *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (*The Barber of Seville*).
  - Read/Review opera’s short synopsis found in the presentation slides.
- Display aria text and/or aria text translation on board. Have students listen again either following along with the text or watching a video performance and taking note of any new ideas.
  - Identify the character singing and the emotions expressed.
  - Compare initial reaction to new understanding.
    - Ask questions such as, “How does viewing the text change your understanding?” “Does knowing the character singing change your understanding?” “How does the text and music add to your understanding of the scene?”
- Discuss/review the definitions and use of poetic devices.
  - Show examples of several poetic devices in presentation slides (rhyme, repetition, meter, alliteration, metaphor, simile, imagery, personification, onomatopoeia, etc.)
    - Ask students to identify poetic devices in the provided examples.
      - Presentation slides include excerpts from “Fake Love” by Drake, “The Passionate Shepherd to His Love” by

Christopher Marlowe, and Count Almaviva's Act I, aria "Ecco ridente in cielo (Lo, in the smiling sky)."

- Discuss guidelines for response poems:
  - Poems should be at least four lines in length, from one of the characters' perspectives in the scene using at least two poetic devices.
- Show an example of a response poem to Count Almaviva's Act I aria, "Ecco ridente in cielo (Lo, in the smiling sky)."
  - Identify the character who could have written the poem, as well as their emotions and response to the action in the scene.

Activity/Practice (12 minutes):

- Students, independently, write a response poem based on this lesson's key scene/aria or their chosen key scene from the Exploring Story Adaptation lesson.
  - Exploring Story Adaptation lesson key scenes: Students can review their chosen key scenes and identify the characters' emotions and responses to the action in the scene. Students will choose a character's point of view, how the character feels about the initial aria, and their response. Students can take into consideration how their adaptation choices may influence the character's response.

Present/Share (5 minutes):

- Willing students share or perform a dramatic reading of their poems in front of class.
  - Encourage students to explore the musical aspects of their poem when performing (e.g. rhythm, tempo, inflection/intonation, etc.)

Reflection (3 minutes):

- Reflect on how poetry and music can enhance the scene, and what was learned in viewing and presenting poems. Ask and discuss:
  - "How does poetry and music enhance the scene?"
  - "What did you learn from viewing and presenting our response poems?"

**Extension/Follow Up/Next Steps:**

- Create a soundscape/backing track using garage band or chrome music or curate a playlist for the key scene to support the mood and action.
- Students can write response poems/arias for the key scene they created adaptation pitches for in the Exploring Story Adaptation lesson.

## ***Il barbiere di Siviglia* (1816)**

Gioachino Rossini, composer; Cesare Sterbini, librettist

*Il barbiere di Siviglia* (*The Barber of Seville*) is based on the play *Le Barbier de Séville* by French playwright Pierre Beaumarchais, which is part of a trilogy, including *The Marriage of Figaro* and *The Guilty Mother*. The events of *The Barber of Seville* take place before *The Marriage of Figaro*. The opera is an example of *opera buffa*, a comic opera style popular in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Its humor is based on clever wordplay, mistaken identities, and the antics of the scheming barber, Figaro. The character of Figaro has had a significant influence on popular culture, appearing in various forms of media. The opera's melodies have been used in cartoons, commercials, and films, making its tunes familiar even to those who may not have seen the opera.

Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* premiered in 1816 at the Teatro Argentina in Rome. Before Rossini's version, there was already a popular *Barber of Seville* opera by Giovanni Paisiello. Paisiello's supporters attempted to sabotage Rossini's premiere, but despite initial difficulties, including a disastrous opening night filled with technical mishaps and heckling, the opera quickly became a huge success and remains one of the most popular operas in the repertoire today.

### **Short Synopsis**

In the opera *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, the clever and resourceful barber Figaro helps Count Almaviva win the heart of Rosina, who is closely watched by her overbearing guardian, Dr. Bartolo. The Count, desiring to be loved for who he truly is rather than for his wealth, has assumed the identity of a poor student named Lindoro to win her affection. Through a series of disguises and clever schemes, Count Almaviva reveals his true identity to Rosina, and they plan to marry. Despite Bartolo's attempts to thwart them, Figaro's wit and cunning ultimately ensure a happy ending for the young lovers.



**IL BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA OPERA SYNOPSIS**  
Gioachino Rossini, composer; Cesare Sterbini, librettist

**ACT I** *Seville, Spain.*

Count Almaviva, a Spanish nobleman, is in love with Rosina. Hoping to be loved for himself (and not for his money), the count has disguised himself as a poor student named Lindoro to woo her. As the opera begins, “Lindoro” comes to serenade Rosina outside the home of Dr. Bartolo, where Rosina lives under lock and key. Soon, Figaro, the barber who knows all the secrets of the town, arrives. Recognizing Lindoro as Count Almaviva, he tells the count that Bartolo is not actually Rosina’s father, but her guardian. In fact, Bartolo plans to marry her in order to get her fortune. Figaro hatches a plan. He suggests that the count disguise himself again, this time as a soldier, and demand lodging in Dr. Bartolo’s residence. This way, he will be close to Rosina. Almaviva is overjoyed, and Figaro looks forward to a nice cash reward from the count for his help.

Rosina, alone in her room, thinks about the voice she heard serenading her a short while before and admits that she has fallen in love with the singer. Knowing that Dr. Bartolo will never allow her to have contact with the unknown man, she decides to send Lindoro a letter by way of Figaro. Figaro arrives, but before Rosina can speak with him, Bartolo appears with Don Basilio, Rosina’s music teacher. Basilio tells Bartolo that Count Almaviva has been seen in Seville. Bartolo, who knows that Almaviva is in love with Rosina, is furious, and the cunning Basilio suggests that they get rid of the count by spreading wicked rumors about him. Bartolo decides to marry Rosina that very day, and he and Basilio leave to prepare the marriage contract. Figaro, who has overheard the plot, warns Rosina. When Rosina asks Figaro about the handsome young man she saw outside her window, Figaro says that it was the student Lindoro and promises to deliver her letter to him.

Bartolo, deeply suspicious, accuses Rosina of writing a letter to a secret lover. Just at that moment, shouting is heard: Count Almaviva, now disguised as a drunken soldier, has arrived at Bartolo’s home. Bartolo claims that he has official exemption from providing housing to soldiers, and in the commotion Almaviva manages to reveal to Rosina that he is, in fact, Lindoro, and passes her a letter of his own. Bartolo demands that Rosina hand over the note, but she tricks him by giving him her laundry list instead. The argument grows more heated, and Figaro, Don Basilio, and the servant woman Berta burst in, announcing that the shouting can be heard throughout the city. Soldiers arrive to arrest the drunken soldier. When he quietly reveals to them that he is actually the count, the soldiers promptly release him. Everyone except Figaro is amazed by this turn of events, and the main characters all reflect on the chaos and confusion of the day.

**ACT II**

Bartolo is still suspicious, and he suggests that perhaps the drunken soldier was a spy for Count Almaviva. The count returns, this time disguised as Don Alonso, a music teacher and student of Don Basilio, to give Rosina her singing lesson. Basilio, he claims, is ill. Bartolo is skeptical until “Don Alonso” shows him Rosina’s letter to Lindoro, claiming to have found it at Count Almaviva’s lodgings. He says that he will use it to

convince Rosina that Lindoro is merely toying with her on Almaviva's behalf. This convinces Bartolo that "Don Alonso" is indeed a student of the scheming Basilio, and he allows the lesson to go ahead. Bartolo finds the music boring and soon nods off. As he snores, Almaviva (whom Rosina believes to be Lindoro) and Rosina declare their love. Figaro arrives to shave Dr. Bartolo. Bartolo is reluctant to leave Rosina alone with the singing teacher, and he sends Figaro to fetch towels. Figaro, always resourceful, uses the opportunity to steal the key to Rosina's balcony door, then causes a diversion, forcing Bartolo to leave the two young lovers alone. Suddenly, Don Basilio, the true singing teacher, arrives. Figaro, Almaviva, and Rosina bribe him to leave. While Bartolo gets his shave, Almaviva plots with Rosina to meet on her balcony that night so they can elope—but Bartolo overhears them and flies into a rage.

Berta comments on the crazy household. Bartolo summons Basilio, telling him to bring a notary so that Bartolo can marry Rosina right away. Bartolo then shows Rosina the letter she wrote to Lindoro, calling it proof that Lindoro is in league with the count. Heartbroken and convinced that she has been deceived, Rosina agrees to marry Bartolo.

While a thunderstorm rages outside, Figaro and Almaviva climb a ladder to Rosina's balcony. Rosina appears and confronts Lindoro, who finally reveals his true identity. Basilio shows up with the notary, but bribed and threatened, he agrees to be a witness to the marriage of Rosina and Almaviva. Bartolo arrives with soldiers, but it is too late. He accepts that he has been beaten, and Figaro, Rosina, and the count celebrate this happy ending.

*Synopsis courtesy of the Metropolitan Opera.*



## Key Scene/Aria in Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*

Video excerpts and timestamps are pulled from the Metropolitan Opera on Demand and YouTube. Performance Dates: Nov. 22, 2014 & Mar. 24, 2007

### KEY SCENE/ARIA: "Ecco ridente in cielo (Lo, in the smiling sky)"

Met Opera on Demand: Track # 5. ACT I: Ecco, ridente in Cielo  
00:58 – 4:32

OR

Act I, Scene 1: Ecco ridente in cielo (Lo, in the smiling sky)  
10:55 – 14:48

Count Almaviva stands beneath Rosina's window on the street, desperately in love and eager to catch a glimpse of her. He serenades her passionately and receives no response.

#### Libretto Excerpt

CONTE

Ecco ridente in cielo  
spunta la bella aurora,  
e tu non sorgi ancora  
e puoi dormir così?  
Sorgi, mia dolce speme,  
vieni bell'idol mio,  
rendi men crudo, oh Dio,  
lo stral che mi feri.  
Oh sorte! già veggo  
quel caro sembiante,  
quest'anima amante  
ottenne pietà!  
Oh, istante d'amore!  
Felice momento!  
Oh, dolce contento  
che egual non ha!

COUNT

Lo, in the smiling sky,  
the lovely dawn is breaking,  
and you are not awake,  
and you are still asleep?  
Arise, my sweetest love,  
oh, come, my treasured one,  
soften the pain, O God,  
of the dart which pierces me.  
Oh, joy! I now see  
that dearest vision,  
has she taken pity  
on this soul in love?  
Oh, moment of love!  
Oh, moment divine!  
Oh, sweet content  
which is unequalled!

*Libretto excerpt courtesy of [DM's Opera Site](#).*

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

## RESPONSE POEM EXAMPLE

Standing near  
Hope takes flight  
A sacred song  
In morning light  
Silence like dawn unfolds  
Notes of love  
Yet untold

**Poetic Devices used:** imagery, personification, alliteration, metaphor, simile, rhyme, symbolism